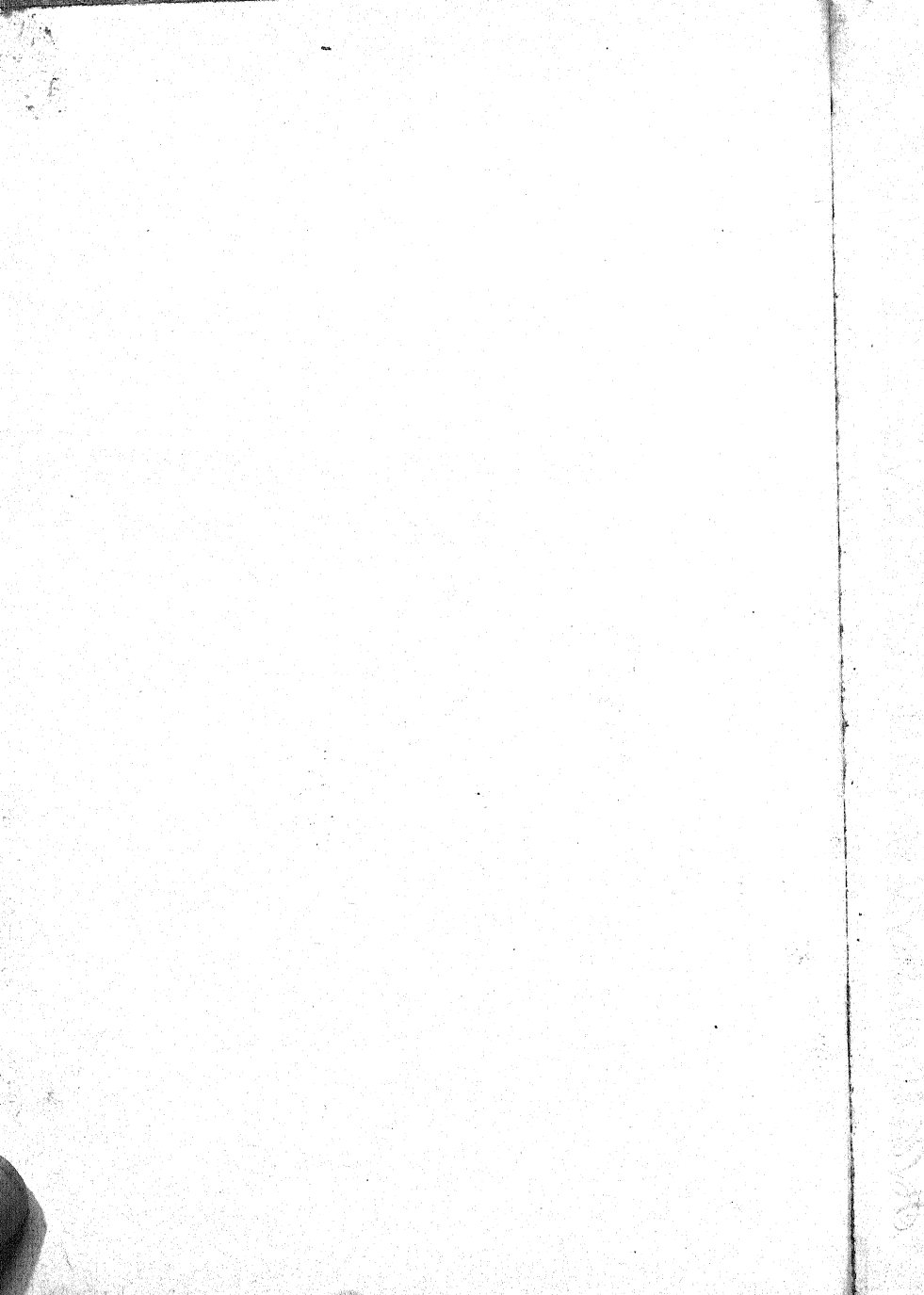


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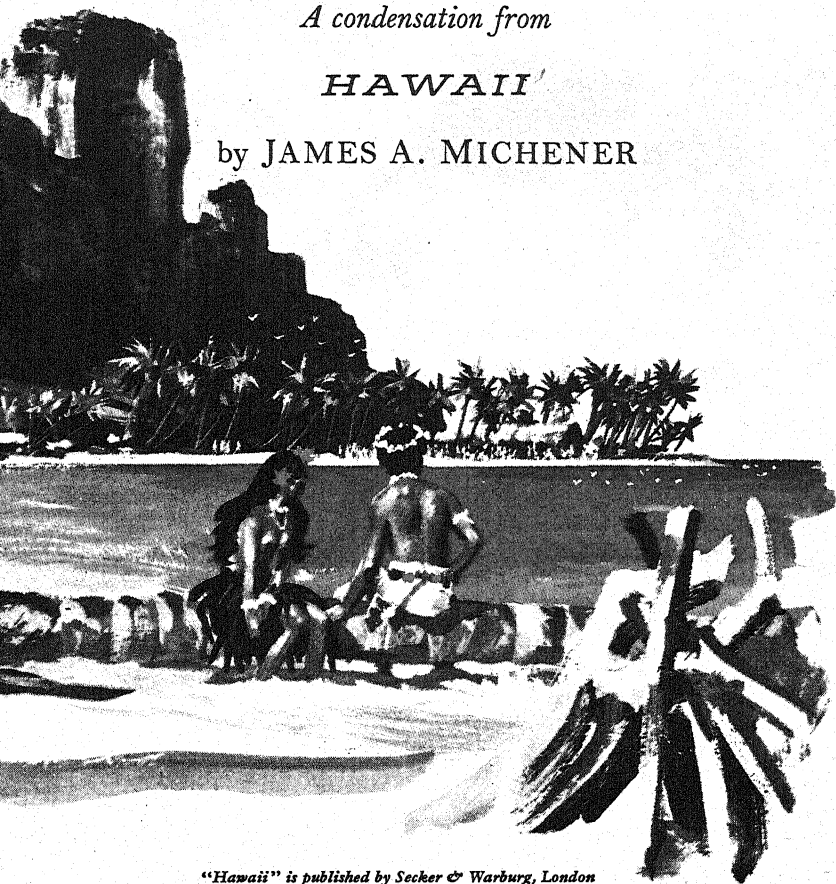
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WEST WIND TO HAWAII

A condensation from

HAWAII'

by JAMES A. MICHENER



"Hawaii" is published by Secker & Warburg, London

OR ITS DISCOVERERS, the lovely, legendary land that is now Hawaii was the goal at the end of a heroic voyage. Sailing in a twin-hulled canoe, twice as far as Columbus and seven centuries before him, the men and women of Bora Bora were driven by a passion to worship their own gods in their own way.

In the volcanic island they called Havaiki they found both a paradise and a hell. The women longed for the little children of the home island, and among the men were some who were lonely for the women they had been forced to leave behind. Yet they all shared a joy in the rich, beautiful new land where the violence and bloodshed which were their heritage would become in time a distant memory.

West Wind to Hawaii is taken from James A. Michener's epic novel *Hawaii*, a best-seller in three continents.

"Packed with excitement and drama . . . one of the few novels worth calling great."

—John O'London's



EARLY ONE MORNING, in the year 817, a swift single-hulled outrigger canoe, sped along by sturdy paddlers and a triangular sail, swept across the open ocean from Havaiki and sought the solitary entrance to the lagoon of Bora Bora.

The island rose from the sea in sharp cliffs and mighty pinnacles of rock. It was so beautiful that it seemed impossible that it had arisen by chance; gods must have formed its deep-set bays and tree-rimmed shores of glistening sand. Round the entire island was hung a protecting necklace of coral on which wild ocean waves broke in fury, trying vainly to leap inside the placid green lagoon. It was an island of rare beauty—wild, impetuous, lovely Bora Bora.

On shore, from a towering rock, a look-out followed the progress of the urgent canoe with dread. He saw the steersman signal his sailors to drop sail, and watched the canoe pivot deftly to avoid crashing on the reef. With enviable skill the steersman headed his canoe towards the perilous opening in the coral wall.

"Now!" he shouted, and his paddlers worked feverishly, standing the canoe off from the rocks. There was a rush of water, a rising of huge waves, and a swift passionate surge of canoe and flashing paddles through the gap.

The instinctive dread which the look-out felt sped his feet as he rushed down steep paths leading to the king's residence, shouting for all to hear, "The High Priest is returning!" Women who heard the message drew closer to their men.

Dashing up to a grass house larger than its neighbours, the look-out fell to the ground, shouting, "The High Priest is in the lagoon!" A tall, brown-skinned young man, courtier to the king, emerged in great

agitation, and without waiting to adjust his ceremonial tapa robe went running towards the palace. Hurrying into the royal presence, he prostrated himself on the soft pandanus matting that covered the earthen floor, announcing with urgency, "The august one is about to land."

The man he addressed was a handsome, large-headed man of thirty-three with close-cropped hair and unusually wide-spaced, grave, wise eyes. If he experienced the same dread as his underlings, he masked it; nevertheless he moved with alacrity to the treasure-room, where he donned an ankle-length robe of pounded tapa bark, throwing about his left shoulder a precious cordon made of yellow feathers, his badge of authority. He adjusted his feather-and-shell helmet; round his neck he placed a chain of shark's teeth. The tall courtier issued a signal, and drums along the shore began to throb in royal rhythms.

"We go to honour the High Priest," the king announced, while an impressive train of tanned warriors, naked to the waist and wrapped in brown tapa, formed behind him. "Hurry, hurry!" he urged them. "We must not be tardy."

Although everyone acknowledged that the king was supreme on Bora Bora, he had found it prudent never to be wanting in courtesies to the spiritual ruler of the island, especially since the requirements of the new god, Oro, were not yet clearly known. The king's father had underestimated the power of the new deity, and during a solemn convocation in the temple of Oro his high priest had suddenly pointed at him as one failing in reverence, and the king's brains had been clubbed in, his body dragged away as another human sacrifice to red Oro, the all-powerful.

But in spite of the king's care, when the procession left the palace the tall young courtier had to warn, "The august one already approaches the landing!" whereupon the king and all his retinue began to run, holding on to their various badges, presenting a ridiculous spectacle. As he ran, the king prayed softly, "If there is to be a convocation, O Gods of Bora Bora, spare me!"

Angry, muttering, damaged in pride, he reached the landing place a few moments before the canoe. The steersman brought it gently to rest, careful lest any untoward accident draw the priest's attention, for he knew what message the priest was bringing from the temple of Oro. On this day it behoved all men to be careful.

When the canoe was secured, the High Priest disembarked with imperial dignity, his white-bark cape with its fringe of dog's teeth shining against his long, black hair. As he moved with his god-carved staff to meet the king, he genuflected slightly, as if to acknowledge the latter's supremacy. Then he waited grimly while King Tamatoa bowed low enough to impress all witnesses with the fact that power had somehow been mysteriously transferred from his hands into those of the priest. "Oh, blessed of the gods!" the king began. "What is the wish of Oro?"

The crowd held its breath in apprehension until the High Priest finally spoke: "A new temple is to be erected in Tahiti and we shall convene to consecrate the god who is to live in that temple."

No one gasped, lest he draw fatal attention to himself. Even Tamatoa himself, who was reasonably sure to be spared, felt his knees weaken while he waited for the dread details. Then in a hushed voice he asked, "When is the convocation?"

"Tomorrow!" the High Priest said sternly, and the king thought: "If the convocation is tomorrow, it must have been decided upon ten days ago! Else how could the news reach far Tahiti in time for their canoe to return to Havaiki tomorrow? Our High Priest must have been in secret consultation with the priests of Oro during all those ten days."

Finally Tamatoa asked, "How many men for Oro?"

"Eight," the priest replied, impersonally. Holding his staff before him, the gaunt dark man moved off towards his temple; then suddenly he whirled about and thrust his staff directly at the steersman who had brought him into the lagoon. "And this one shall be the first!" he screamed.

"No! No!" the steersman pleaded, falling to his knees.

Implacably, the priest pointed the staff. "When the seas were upon us, this one prayed not to Oro for salvation but to Tane."

"Oh, no!" the sailor pleaded.

"I watched his lips," the priest said with awful finality. Attendants from the temple hauled off the quaking steersman. "And you!" the dreadful voice cried again, thrusting his staff at an unsuspecting watcher. "In the temple of Oro, on the holy day, your head nodded." Once more the attendants closed in, dragging the culprit away.

Solemnly the High Priest withdrew and Tamatoa was left with the miserable task of nominating six additional human sacrifices. The aide whose tardiness had been the cause of the unseemly rush to the beach was first chosen; the look-out, blamed by the aide, was next. The other four would be taken from the slaves. This decided, the king strode back to the palace, while the tall courtier and the look-out, already pinioned by the priests, stood in limp amazement, appalled by the catastrophe in which each had so accidentally involved the other.

As THE frightened crowd dispersed, King Tamatoa's brother, Teroro, stood bitter and silent in the shade of a breadfruit tree. He was taller than most, better muscled than any, and marked by a lean, insolent courage that no man could mistake. He had remained apart because he hated the High Priest, despised the new god Oro, and was revolted by the incessant demand for human sacrifice, and the High Priest, of course, had detected the young chief's absence from the welcoming throng, a breach of conformity which enraged him.

After the ceremony, Teroro's stately wife, a golden-skinned young woman with flowing hair that held banana blossoms, sat with him by the lagoon. "Teroro," she said, "I am afraid for you. You must not go to the convocation."

"Who else can command our canoe?" he asked impatiently. "I'm not afraid of the convocation, Marama. Besides, my brother may need my help. Without me events could go badly."

Marama, whose name meant the moon, all-seeing and compassionate, retreated to a different argument. "Last year," she said, "a woman from Havaiki confided to me that the priests there consider our High Priest the ablest of all. They plan to give him a position of prominence."

"I wish they would, and take him from this island."

"But they wouldn't dare do this as long as his own island is not completely won over. It seems to me that the High Priest will do everything possible in this convocation to prove to the priests of Havaiki that he is more devoted to Oro than they."

As often when the wise, moon-faced woman spoke, her husband began to pick up a thread of importance. "You think that, to impress others, the High Priest will sacrifice the king?"

"No, Teroro," Marama corrected. "It is you whom the High Priest

suspects of disloyalty to Oro. Because you still worship Tane, it is your feet he will place upon the rainbow."

"Only in my heart do I worship Tane."

"But if I can read your heart, so can the priests."

His comment on this was forestalled by the summons of an agitated messenger. Teroro was wanted by the king.

THE PALACE was a large, low building, its roof of palm fronds held up by coco-nut-tree pillars carved with figures of gods. Rolled-up lengths of matting could be dropped from the eaves for secrecy or protection from rain. The principal room contained many signs of royalty: feather gods, carved shark's teeth, and huge *Tridacna* shells. All parts of the structure were held together by strands of golden-brown sennit, the marvellous island rope woven from coco-nut-palm fibres. Nearly two miles of it had been used in construction; wherever one piece of timber touched another, pliant golden sennit held the parts together. A man could sit in a room tied with sennit and revel in its intricate patterns the way a navigator studies stars at night or a child tirelessly watches waves on sand.

Teroro found Tamatoa deeply perturbed. "Will the canoe be ready by sunset?" the king asked.

"It will, but I hope you won't be on it."

"I am determined to go to this convocation," Tamatoa replied.

"Only evil can befall you," Teroro insisted.

The king rose from his mats and walked disconsolately to the palace entrance, from which he could see the majestic cliffs of Bora Bora and the sun-swept lagoon. At this moment the warrior-king Tamatoa was a symbol of overpowering authority to his younger brother; although Teroro wanted to grasp him by his arm and pull him down on to the mats for an honest conversation, he could never have brought himself to do so. The king was the instrumentality whereby the gods delivered *mana*—the spiritual sanctification of the heavens—to Bora Bora. Even to touch him or pass upon his shadow was to drain away some of that *mana*. So Teroro prostrated himself on the matting, crept to the king's feet, and whispered, "Sit with me, brother, and let us talk." And while the flies droned in morning heat, the two men talked.

They were a handsome pair, separated in age by six years. Their

father had named his first son Tamatoa—the Warrior; and then when a younger brother was born he had reasoned: "How fortunate! When Tamatoa becomes king his brother can serve him as high priest." And the younger child had been named Teroro—the Brain, the man who can divine complex things quickly. But so far he had not proved his name to be appropriate.

Tamatoa had developed into a classical island warrior; six times in his reign he had beaten back invaders from powerful Havaiki. Teroro, on the other hand, showed no signs of becoming a priest. Tall and wiry, with a handsome thin face, he had an impetuous temper and was slow to grasp abstract ideas. His love was navigation and the challenge of unknown seas.

"If I must be sacrificed to bring this island into harmony with new gods, then I will be sacrificed. But I am afraid it is for you the gods will send the rainbow," Tamatoa whispered.

"We have stood against them in the past, we can do so again."

"In the past they had canoes and spears. Now they have plans and plots. How has the High Priest succeeded in manipulating our people so successfully?"

"When our people see many sacrifices they know the gods listen. It makes the island seem safer."

The king studied his brother. "Would it not be possible for you to accept their new god?" he asked cautiously.

"Impossible," Teroro said flatly. "I was born with the blessing of Tane. My father died defending Tane, and his father before him. I will never consider another god."

The king breathed deeply. "Those are my thoughts, too. But I am afraid the High Priest will destroy us with his tricks."

"I'll trick *him*!" Teroro cried in frustration. "When the club falls, I shall kill the High Priest. I will rage through all Havaiki."

"As I thought!" the king cried sharply. "You have a plan to riot. Oh, Teroro, it will accomplish nothing. That is why you must not attend this convocation."

Teroro spoke humbly yet stubbornly: "Beloved brother, that is why I must go. I swore to our father that I would protect you. But I will give you my promise not to riot unless they strike you."

He walked out into the glorious high noon of Bora Bora. The sun

filtered through palm fronds and breadfruit leaves, making soft patterns in the dust. Naked children called back and forth, and fishermen hauled their canoes on to the beach. Through the beautiful and dusty heat Teroro moved slowly to a long shed, under which *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, the mammoth ceremonial canoe of Bora Bora, rested.

It was the swiftest ship the world at that time had ever known, capable of doing thirty knots in bursts, ten knots hour after hour for days at a time; a twin-hulled craft seventy-nine feet long, with tiered sterns twenty-two feet high and a solid platform slung across the hulls on which forty men could ride, with pigs and pandanus and water stowed safely in the hidden innards.

"Wait for the west wind," the men who built the canoe had advised, "for it blows strong and sure from the heart of the hurricane." The north wind cannot be depended upon, and the east wind is no treasure, for it blows constantly, and the south wind brings nothing but irritating minor storms. Wait for the west wind! It blows from the heart of the hurricane. It is a wind to match this great canoe.

BY NIGHTFALL *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* was in the water and ready. The upswept sterns were decorated with flowers and pennants of yellow tapa. The permanent platform which held the two hulls together was covered with polished planks. At the forward end stood an ultra-sacred grass-thatched temple, towards which a solemn procession of priests now moved in dread silence.

The High Priest, a skull-cap of red feathers on his hair, proceeded to the grass temple and paused, at which all Bora Borans, king and slave alike, fell to the ground and hid their faces, for what was about to occur was too sacred for even a king to behold.

The statue of Oro himself, woven of sennit and with sea-shells as eyes, was about to be placed inside the temple for its journey to Havaiki. From his robes the High Priest produced a wrapping of ti leaves, which hid the god, and, holding the bundle high above him, he prayed in a terrifying voice, then knelt and placed the god inside the temple. He moved back, struck the canoe with his staff and cried, "*Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, take thy god safely to Havaiki!"

The prostrate crowd rose silently, and the young chiefs who would paddle the canoe leaped into the two hulls. Next the seers of the island,

old men of wisdom, stepped on board wearing solemn brown tapa and skull-caps edged with dog's teeth. Teroro, wearing a warrior's helmet of feathers and shark's teeth, took his place in the prow, while the king, in precious yellow robes which covered his ankles, stood amidships. Then the High Priest announced that he was ready to accept the sacrifices.

Servants of Oro came forth with palm fronds which they spread in careful patterns, aft of the temple, and on these were laid strange gifts: a fish from the lagoon, a shark caught at sea, a turtle taken on a special island, and a pig that had from birth been dedicated to Oro. Then, at the last moment, priests led forth the eight human sacrifices, and the people of Bora Bora, in awful silence, watched their neighbours depart for the last time.

Teroro, raising his paddle, gave the canoe a mighty shove that sent it into the lagoon. It did not spring lightly towards the reef as usual, but moved reluctantly. By the time the stars had risen, it had covered only a small portion of its gloomy journey to Havaiki.

When the constellation which astronomers in other parts of the world had named the Lion was rising in the east, the seers agreed that the time was near. The High Priest confirmed the fact that the red-tipped hour of dawn, sacred to Oro, was at hand. He nodded, and a huge, slack-headed drum was struck in slow rhythm, sending its cry far out to sea.

The rest of the world was silent. Even the lapping waves and birds who customarily cried at dawn ceased their murmuring at the approach of dread Oro. There was only the drum, until, as night paled and red streamers rose in the east, Teroro caught the sound of another drum, and then a third, far in the distance. The canoes, still invisible to one another, were beginning to assemble for the solemn procession into the channel of Havaiki.

The men in *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* had varied thoughts as they approached the landing. The High Priest reasoned that, considering Bora Bora's stupid persistence in allegiance to Tane, the more sacrifices to Oro the better. "Weed them out, root and branch," he muttered to himself. "We must impress the islands."

King Tamatoa's thoughts were different. He looked upon sacrifices as the simplest way of obtaining a steady flow of *mana*, but he felt

considerable uneasiness over their number, for Bora Bora was not a large island. The king wondered: "Is this sudden conversion to Oro a device by the wise men of Havaiki whereby they can depopulate my island?"

Teroro saw things more simply. He was outraged. The death of slaves he could condone. But to execute the best fighters on Bora Bora was wrong and disastrous.

The convocation was planned to last three days, during which assemblies of priests took place in an extensive, roofless rock temple perched on a magnificent plateau overlooking the ocean. At one end an inner temple, thatched with palm, had been constructed, and in it reposed the ark which housed the holy of holies, the ultimate statue of Oro. The exposure of this source-god was so solemn an undertaking that not even kings could witness the ceremony; they were excluded during the first august meeting when Oro was taken from his ark.

There were, however, witnesses. In each canoe the human sacrifices had had their heads crushed, then had been hauled to the temple and stacked in a pile for Oro's approval. When through his highest priest Oro granted assent, the corpses were hung on trees surrounding the temple. There they were free to gaze with dead eyes upon what not even kings could witness.

The people, in terrified silence, now paid reverence as *mana* flowed into the statues of Oro from each island, into the canoes set on a small plateau, and into the island kings, who were required to sit apart, absolutely silent, for seven hours. But the temple grounds were not entirely silent. Teroro was holding a secret, hushed conversation with the twenty-nine remaining members of his crew in a remote glade. "Are we willing to speak with frankness?" he asked.

"What risk do we run?" a fiery young chief named Mato asked. "If we talk they will kill us. If we remain silent . . ." He bashed his fist into his hand. "Let's talk."

Teroro held a length of sennit, which he twisted and untwisted, saying slowly, "I think the High Priest intends to offer our king as a supreme sacrifice to Oro. He wants to impress the other priests with his control over Bora Bora. But he's got to give the signal himself, because, if he kills by stealth, where would be his political advantage?"

Mato, from the north side of Bora Bora, said sternly, "I think that, if

the priest even begins to point at Tamatoa, we must surround the king and fight our way to the canoe."

"I think exactly the same thing," Teroro said.

There was a silence as the other twenty-eight men contemplated what such a bold step involved, but before any could turn away in cowardice Teroro placed the sennit in his belt, and spoke rapidly: "To succeed we must ensure three things. First, we must somehow move our canoe from the plateau to the top of the hill so we can rush it into the water."

"I'll take care of that," Hiro the steersman promised.

"How?"

"I don't know."

Teroro liked his honest answer but nevertheless pushed his face to within a few inches of the steersman's. "You know that if the canoe is not in position we will all die?"

"I do," the young chief said grimly.

"Next," Teroro said, "we must have two very determined men sitting on the rocks at the temple exit."

Brash Mato cried, "I'm one, and I want Pa for the other."

A wiry shark-faced man with no chin, Pa, the Fortress, stepped forward and announced: "I'm the other."

"The third requirement," Teroro said, "is that each of the rest of us be prepared to kill instantly anyone who moves towards Tamatoa, and once we make a move we must sweep Tamatoa up and with an unbroken rush get him to the canoe. Once we are sea-borne, *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* will be our safeguard."

"They will never catch us," the steersman promised.

Then Mato said, "There is one grave fault in this plan. Before we sailed, Marama said to me, 'My husband is sure that the High Priest plans to kill the king. But I am certain that Teroro himself is the target.' What do we do if your wife is right?"

Teroro could not reply. He could see only his patient, worried wife moving among the men, enlisting their promise to protect him. It was Pa who spoke. "Marama spoke to me, too," he said, "and our duty is clear. If they strike at Teroro, you, Mato, with your men save the king and I with mine will rescue Teroro."

"I am not the important one," Teroro said honestly.

"To us you are," his men replied.

THAT NIGHT the High Priest called his assistants to him, and they sat in the great temple, the bodies dancing above them, while he questioned them on the events of the day. It was suspected, one of his spies reported, that Teroro had held a meeting with his men, but the suspicion was unconfirmed by evidence.

For a long time the High Priest contemplated this unwelcome news. Finally he said, "If we could be certain that a meeting was held, we could eliminate the entire canoe. We would" But when he weighed all consequences he decided against this.

Suddenly he turned to his burly executioner and said softly, "Tomorrow I don't want you to stand near either the king or Teroro at any time. You, Rere-ao," and he addressed his spy, "are you as swift of club as you once were?"

"I am."

"You are to place yourself inconspicuously so that at an instant's signal you can kill Teroro. Watch him constantly. If he makes even the slightest move, kill him. One way or another," he concluded, "tomorrow will see Bora Bora finally delivered to Oro. There are many roads to victory, my brothers."

NEXT MORNING Hiro the steersman took a sharp rock and slashed several of the sennit strands that bound *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* together. Then he hurried to the priest in charge of the canoe to announce: "We must have scraped coral."

The priest studied the broken sennit. "It can be mended with fresh cord," he said.

"Yes," the steersman agreed, "and we ought to do it while we are all under the protection of Oro."

Such sentiment charmed the priest, and he was therefore receptive when Hiro suggested, "Wouldn't it be easier to drag the canoe out here, where the sun can tighten the new sennit?"

They edged the canoe into the exact position Teroro required. "Will the mending take long?" the priest asked.

"No," Hiro assured him. "I mustn't miss the convocation."

"You must not," the priest agreed. It seemed a good omen that Hiro, one of Teroro's prominent supporters, should thus voluntarily signify his affection for Oro.

THE CONVOCATION began with the assembly seated on rocks stretching out from the main altar, where two pigs were being disembowelled. Teroro, watching first the High Priest and then the king, was totally resolved to defy Oro, even if it had to be done here in the very seat of the red god's omnipotence. But he was not prepared for the High Priest's strategy, for, while Teroro was anticipating an entirely different tactic, the priest suddenly whirled and pointed his staff at one of the finest warriors in Teroro's crew. "He ate of the sacred pig of Oro!" the priest shouted, but the young warrior did not know why he died, for the executioner had anticipated the charge and had already crushed the man's skull.

In dismay Teroro looked at the steersman, Hiro, who stared with equal dismay at him. Their plans protected Tamatoa, and Teroro himself, but they had not foreseen the High Priest's clever assault upon lesser members of the Bora Bora community. Of them all, only one man saw clearly in these awful moments. Tamatoa, like many successful kings, had no marked intellectual ability but a powerful, stolid insight. He realized that the High Priest had determined not to assassinate him and his brother but to drive them from the islands by irresistible pressure, constantly applied. "Patiently and with cunning," the king reasoned, "he will alienate and terrify my people, and we will have to go."

Again the High Priest whirled his staff of death, at another member of Teroro's crew, and the terrible club descended once more. Sick at heart, King Tamatoa looked at his younger brother and saw Teroro befuddled and distraught.

It was at this moment, in the sacred temple of Oro, with the bodies of his finest men dangling before him and strewn upon the altar, that King Tamatoa whispered in his heart: "Oro, you have triumphed. I am powerless to oppose you." The thought crystallized a decision towards which he had been fumbling for months, but from which he had always retreated. Now that he had accepted the obvious—that Oro had conquered—the next obvious conclusion was easy to reach, and in the stillness of the morning Tamatoa said the fateful words for the first time: "We will depart from Bora Bora and leave it to you, Oro. We will go upon the sea and find other islands where we can worship our own gods."

During the rest of the convocation, Tamatoa did not confide his decision to anyone, but he did summon Mato. "I hold you responsible for my brother's life, Mato," he said. "If he has plots afoot, you are part of them. He must not die, even if you have to tie him to the canoe. I need him now more than ever."

So when Teroro convened his bewildered companions Mato spoke first: "We must go back to Bora Bora and plan our revenge."

"We'll go back and work out a plan," shark-faced Pa seconded.

Teroro muttered, "But we will have revenge!" And thinking only of some utter destruction and disaster, he bided his time.

WHEN A convocation ended, the priests wisely withdrew and encouraged the population to release its tensions in a wild, spontaneous celebration that sometimes lasted for three days. Now women were free to join their men, and musicians crowded the night with echoes. Beautiful girls dressed in skirts of aromatic leaves swept into the mad hula of Havaiki and danced provocatively before the visitors, as if to challenge: "Can the women of Tahiti move to music the way we can?"

Teroro, watching the dances, muttered to himself, "May the women of Havaiki be damned." When some beauty, her body illuminated by palm-frond torches and etched in smoke from the fires where pigs roasted, danced past him in invitation, he would look at the ground, muttering, "I will destroy Havaiki. I will kill every priest of Oro."

His men could not maintain such powerful resolve. One by one the young chiefs threw aside their spears and leaped into the dancing circle, shouting and entering into the wild gyrations of the hula. When they had driven themselves into an ecstasy, they would leap high into the air, slap their thighs and prance for a moment before their equally frenzied partners. Then each would pause, look at the other, and break into laughter, whereupon the girl would start to walk idly towards the shadows, her partner following with equal unconcern until at the last they gave a cry and rushed together to some protected glade.

As they disappeared, old women in the chanting circle were free to shout encouragement, usually of the grossest kind, at which the audience roared with approval. "Show him what Havaiki's famous for, Rere!" a woman screamed. "*Auwe!*" another cried. "Make the moon hide its face for shame!" "Remember what I taught you, Rere!" the first

chanter shouted. When the advice became almost unbearably clinical, the general audience collapsed into gales of merriment, the music halted, and everyone rolled about the earth in animal joy.

Teroro did not even look up when a marvellous young girl danced almost on his toes, flashing her body very close to him. But when an old woman cackled above the drums, "I keep wondering how they have babies on Bora Bora. Men from Havaiki must swim over at night!" he had to smile, for islanders loved wit, even when directed against themselves. At this moment a famous chief of Havaiki, fat Tatai, who guarded the temple, appeared and said quietly, "We would like you to eat with us, Teroro." And he led the young chief away from the fires to the outskirts of the village where, in the chief's compound, the feast was spread.

Teroro had barely finished licking burnt pig fat from his fingers when to the west of the compound a tiny drum—no more than eight inches of hollowed-out branch beaten with a wand—began its chatter. It was followed by the steadier throbbing of several big drums as the musicians entered. Now from the night's soft shadows figures began to materialize: the women of the Havaiki chiefs. In tones less raucous than those in the village square, they began the haunting strains of old island love songs, and the bitterness went out of his heart.

*"When the rolling surf
And the rising moon
And the swaying palm
And the high white bird
And the lazy fish
All speak of love,
I cry in the night:
Where are you, love?"*

It was to the strains of this languorous island song that Teroro saw approaching him, in the gentle rhythm of a chief's hula, a slim, wiry-hipped girl of fourteen with midnight-black hair that fell to her knees. When the song ended, she indicated a swifter beat, and began to dance before Teroro, the fronds of her ti-leaf skirt whirling excitedly about her legs. Against his will, Teroro gazed back at her dark eyes. For a



moment he was inspired to leap to his feet and join this remarkably beautiful girl in the dance; but he felt that he must ignore Havaiki women, since he would one day destroy this evil place. Yet when he saw the look of intense disappointment on her face he felt ashamed and, against his better judgment, looked at her and smiled. Then, on some surging impulse, he leaped to his feet and whirled into the frenzied postures of the even more erotic Bora Bora hula.

Now the beautiful young girl acted as if she had never seen her new partner before. Dancing impersonally, her eyes far away, she led the drums to faster rhythms until in mounting fire her entire body quivered. She bent her knees and danced close to the ground. Then, in the most characteristic passage of the Havaiki hula, she spread her knees and allowed her movements to become slow and madly provocative. With one hand she caught the ends of her hair and passed them between her teeth. Savagely aroused, Teroro danced until with a fiery leap he sprang high into the air, descending with his toes not inches from hers while a woman shouted, "*Auwe!*" and the drums rose to new violence.

Then, magically, everything stopped. There was dead silence, and the young girl, walking slowly, moved demurely towards the shadows that marked the sleeping areas of the compound. When she had vanished, Teroro with maximum indifference stopped to throw a driftwood brand into the fire before he started edging towards the shadows.

He found her waiting for him before a small house which her family had reserved for her on her thirteenth birthday, for island parents encouraged their daughters to experiment with many young men and to learn the ways of love, since men did not like to marry any girl who had not already proved that she could bear children. "This is my house," she said simply.

"What is your name?"

"I am Tehani, Chief Tatai's daughter."

"Tehani. The little darling," Teroro interpreted.

The girl laughed nervously and, with a swift passage of his arm about her waist, Teroro swept her up and carried her into her house. Happily, she pressed her lips to his and when he had placed her on the soft pandanus mats she pulled him down to her.

But later, as he lay in the starlight that drifted in through the doorway, he swore to himself: "I will destroy this whole island."

IN THE MORNING, after Teroro had eaten in the men's house, he returned to the girl, and after a while they began the famous Havaiki slapping game, wherein to an ancient chant each gently tapped the other's finger-tips, then shoulders, then sides, then thighs. As the game progressed the slaps grew in intensity, until perversely they dropped away to the tenderest of caresses. "This is the way we fight on Havaiki," Tehani said laughingly, when the game had ended in a long embrace. "Can girls of Bora Bora fight with their men like this?"

Teroro was not pleased with the question, and although Tehani sensed his irritation she nevertheless pursued: "Is it true that on tiny Bora Bora you still pray to Tane?" The manner in which she pronounced *tiny* and *Tane* betrayed the contempt with which people of her island had always regarded Bora Bora. Teroro did not rise to the insult. With studied courtesy he said, "We pray to Oro, which is why, even though we are so small, we invariably defeat Havaiki in war."

Tehani blushed at the humiliating memory. She said, "Did you wonder why I brought you here?"

"At first love-making a man sometimes wonders," Teroro said. "At the second he no longer bothers."

"And at the third," Tehani whispered, "he decides to stay with this girl . . . to become a man of Havaiki."

Teroro pulled away and said, "For a warrior there is only one home, Bora Bora."

It was an ancient custom that high-born women could seek their husbands. Tehani now did so. "Stay here with me, Teroro."

"If you want to be my wife, you'll have to come to my island."

"You already have a first wife there, Teroro. Live here, and I will be your first wife."

The young chief held the girl off and studied her marvellous face. "Why do you ask this, Tehani? You could have any man on Havaiki."

The girl hesitated, then decided to speak the truth. "Your island is doomed, Teroro. You must escape. Come here. Be loyal to Oro. We can have a good life."

"Has your father suggested this?"

"Yes."

"What evil is he planning?"

"I dare not say," she answered. Taking Teroro's hands, she knelt

before him and pleaded softly, "I have shown you how sweet Havaiki could be because I want to save your life. Here you can become a powerful chief. Oro is generous to warriors like you."

"I belong to Bora Bora," Teroro said with passionate conviction. "I will never desert that island," and he started to leave.

Tehani caught him. "Stay here with me," she pleaded.

He was almost tempted into confiding to her the revenge he had been formulating, but he fought back the impulse and said, "If I ever did come back to Havaiki, you would be my woman."

"Come soon, Teroro, for Bora Bora is doomed."

CERTAINLY, when the visiting canoes stood out to sea, it seemed that the days of Bora Bora's greatness had vanished, for it was a dispirited group that occupied *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*. King Tamatoa acknowledged that in the game of power he had permanently lost: all strength now lay with Oro. Teroro, surveying his depleted ranks, brooded on revenge, but he had to recognize that he had been outwitted. As for the crew, they sensed that ultimate power lay with the High Priest, but they hoped to be part of Teroro's revenge.

There was one emotion which all in the boat shared, for at the end of the day, just before entering the home lagoon, the travellers saw the sun sink towards the west, throwing rich golden lights upon their magic island, and each man instinctively felt: "This is the beautiful island. This is the land upon which the gods have spent particular care."

For to see Bora Bora at the end of a journey, with sunset upon the peaks, with dark night drifting in upon the valleys, and with sea birds winging homeward; to see the red line of sunset climbing the mountain faces until the top was reached, and darkness, and to cry, "Hold! Hold! Let it remain day until I touch the shore!" and to catch within the lagoon the sounds of children at play and echoes of home, while outside the reef the ocean roared—to have known Bora Bora at such a moment was to have known beauty.

IT WAS with enhanced regret, therefore, that King Tamatoa led his brother to the palace and carefully lowered the matting walls to protect himself from spies. Then in a low voice he delivered the striking words: "I have decided that we must leave Bora Bora."

Teroro was stunned. He had never even contemplated such a retreat. "Why should we leave? Where can we go?"

"To the north."

This simple phrase carried implications that were difficult for Teroro to digest. He recalled that, centuries before, legendary canoes had left for the north. A mysterious old chant purported to give sailing directions to a land some said thirty, some fifty days distant, that lay under the Seven Little Eyes, the holy constellation others called the Pleiades, whose rising launched the new year. This chant implied that at least one of the canoes must have returned. Words from it came to his mind:

*"Sail to the Seven Little Eyes,
To the land guarded by Little Eyes."*

But as he spoke the words he grew angry; they conjured up a picture of him fleeing Bora Bora. "Why should we go?" he blustered.

"There is no place for us here any longer. Oro has triumphed."

"We can fight! We can kill. . . ."

"We can do nothing," the king snapped. "Teroro, if we decided to sail with the next big storm that brings us a west wind, how many people could we carry in our canoe?"

"Would they let us take *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*?"

"If not, we would have to fight for it."

"Good!" Now Teroro could begin to see specific action.

"How many men?" Tamatoa pressed.

"About sixty, with supplies and a house for our gods."

"Does anyone on Bora Bora know the directions north?"

"It was our uncle, Tupuna, who taught them to me."

"Is he loyal to Oro?" Tamatoa asked.

"Yes, but he is also loyal to you."

"We wouldn't dare take so long a voyage without a priest. To be alone on the ocean for fifty days"

"I would want a priest with us," Teroro agreed. "Who would read the omens?" And he sent a messenger to fetch old Tupuna.

The brothers lay down on the matting and resumed their planning.

"Who should join us?" Tamatoa asked.

Teroro rattled off the names of warriors: "Mato, Pa"

"We aren't going to battle," Tamatoa corrected. "We are going north. Find a man who can make knives, one who can strip pandanus, a good fishhook man. I've been counting spaces in my mind. We can take thirty-seven men, six slaves and fifteen women."

"Women," Teroro gasped.

"Suppose the land to the north is empty. We would watch our friends set their feet upon the rainbow, one by one, and each as he left would be irreplaceable. There would be no children."

"Will you take a wife?" Teroro asked.

"I will take none of my present wives," the king replied. "I will take our sister Natabu, so that we can have royal children."

"I'll take Marama."

The king hesitated, then took Teroro by the hands. "I am sorry, brother, Marama may not go," he said gravely. "We will take only women who can bear children."

"Then I won't go," Teroro said flatly. Before the king could reply, the flaps parted and old Tupuna of the white topknot and the flowing beard came in. He was nearly seventy, a remarkable age in the islands, where a man of thirty-three like the king was already an elder, so he spoke with authority. "I come to my brother's sons," he said gravely, taking a seat on the matting. "I come to my own children."

The king studied the old man carefully, and then said in a low voice, "Uncle, we place our safety in your hands."

In a voice mellowed by years and wisdom Tupuna said, "You're planning to leave Bora Bora and want me to join you." And as they gasped, he reassured them benevolently. "All the priests know you're planning to leave. We've just been discussing it."

"But we didn't know ourselves until we entered this room an hour ago," Teroro protested.

"It's the only sensible thing to do," Tupuna pointed out.

"Will you join us?" Tamatoa asked directly.

"Yes. I told the priests I was loyal to Oro, but I could not let my family depart without an intercessor with the gods."

"Will they let us take *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*?" the king asked.

"Yes," the old man replied. "I pleaded for that in particular, because when I was younger I helped to consecrate the trees that built this canoe. I shall be happy to have it as my grave."

"But I expect to reach land!" Teroro said. "Somewhere!"

"All men who set forth thus expect to reach land." The old man laughed indulgently. "But none ever return."

"Teroro just told me that you knew sailing directions," the king protested. "Somebody must have returned."

"There are sailing directions. But where did they come from? Are they a dream? They tell us only of a land guarded by the Seven Little Eyes. Perhaps the chant refers only to the dream of all men that there must be a better land somewhere."

There was silence, and then Teroro said, "Have they agreed to let us take our gods, Tane and Ta'aroa?"

"Yes," the old man said.

"I am glad," Teroro said. "When a man gets down to the ocean's edge . . . when he starts on a voyage like this . . ."

He did not finish, but Tupuna spoke for him. He said in a deep, prophetic voice, "Are there people where we go? No one knows. Will we find taro and breadfruit and fat pigs? Will we even find land? All we know, sons of my heart, is that if we are in the hands of the gods, even if we perish on the great ocean, we will not die unnoticed."

"And we know one thing more," the king added. "If we stay here we shall one by one be sacrificed. Oro has ordained it."

"May I tell the High Priest that? It will make our departure easier."

In humbleness, Tamatoa replied, "You may tell him."

WHEN THE decision to depart from Bora Bora was whispered from one village to the next, the island became a curious place, because no one admitted officially that the king was leaving. The High Priest continued to pay public deference to Tamatoa, and old Tupuna officiated at daily prayers to Oro. But under this surface of indifference, all were preoccupied with one job: loading a canoe for an unknown voyage. Particular care was given to food supplies for the new land. Experts sought taro roots that would produce the grey-blue tuber which made the best poi, and coco-nuts that came from the strongest trees, and breadfruit which produced big heads rich in starch and glutinous sap; and Tupuna spent three days selecting meaty chickens and dogs that would bake well.

Then came the day when departure could no longer be politely

masked, for with a saw made from a large sea-shell Teroro boldly cut eleven feet from each of the canoe's high sterns. "We cannot risk such high adornment on a long trip," he explained.

"*Auwe!*" cried men and women along the shore. "The great canoe of Bora Bora is being desecrated." Gently Teroro handed down the god-carved sterns, and priests bore them to the temple. A crowd gathered while he used dried shark's skin to smooth the ends of the truncated sterns, and he kept his back to the watchers as he worked, for he was praying, "*Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, forgive me for this mutilation," and out of his humiliation an obsessive rage was generated which was to make his departure from Bora Bora an event ever to be remembered. His rage increased when, later, the gossip reached him: Tamatoa was to be succeeded as king by fat Tatai. "And they had the insolence to propose that I desert my brother and leave Bora Bora to marry Tatai's daughter . . . trade places with Tatai!" he told Marama bitterly. As always, when he felt humiliated, he decided upon a plan of swift action. "Marama," he said, "go and assemble all who have agreed to paddle the canoe. Tell anyone who asks that we are going to take *West-Wind* out for a trial. But whisper to each man that he must bring his war club."

"No, Teroro!"

"Do you want us to creep away, unavenged?"

"Yes. There's no dishonour in that."

"Not for a woman, perhaps," Teroro said.

Marama considered what was involved, the possibility of death and the chance that Havaiki might send canoes in retaliation, thus ending escape to the north; but after she had considered for a long time she said, "Since men are what they are, Teroro, you ought not to go unavenged. May the gods protect you."

So TWO NIGHTS before the intended departure, with the dying moon not yet risen, and a good west wind promising a storm, the double canoe was gently beached on Havaiki where the men of Bora Bora had been so deeply humiliated. Thirty resolute men, leaving two to guard the canoe, slipped into the night towards the village where fat Tatai, the intended king of Bora Bora, slept. They had almost reached it when a dog barked, causing a woman to cry, "Who's stealing breadfruit?"

She sounded an alarm, but by then Teroro and his men had fallen upon the village and reached Tatai's compound. There Teroro and Pa swept into the main hut, smashing all they encountered.

A girl's soft voice whispered, "He is not here, Teroro!" Then she screamed, for Pa's club struck her a glancing blow on the shoulder, and from the floor she whimpered, "He is not here."

Pa was about to crush her skull when Teroro pulled him away. In the light of a flare, he rediscovered Tehani's spectacular beauty, and on the impulse of the moment he lifted her up so her face was close to his. "Will you go north with me?" he rasped.

"Yes."

"Wait for me at the canoe." He thrust her towards the shore and then caught her again, muttering, "We have come to kill your father. Do you still want to go?"

"I'll wait at the canoe," she said.

Now he heard Mato shout, "We've found him."

"Save him for me," Teroro pleaded, but when he reached the prostrate figure he saw that Pa had already killed him. Grabbing a handful of thatch from a roof, he spread it about Tatai's head. "The new king of Bora Bora!" he cried derisively.

"To the canoe!" the steersman shouted.

"Not before we destroy this place!" Teroro cried, and grabbing a brand he swept it along the thatch of a near-by house; the rising wind ripped the flames along, and soon the environs of Oro's temple were ablaze. In this light, the men of Bora Bora retreated.

As they drove off the pursuit and leaped into the canoe, Tehani ran from a clump of palms crying, "Teroro!"

"Traitor!" the defeated Havaiki warriors cried, and would have killed her had not Teroro leaped into the surf and run back to rescue her. Dodging spears, he dashed for the beach and swept her into his arms. The canoe was standing out into the channel, but Mato dived in and took the girl, whose shoulder was so damaged that she could not swim. They set their course for Bora Bora, but before they had left the shadow of Havaiki Teroro said to the girl, "We found your father."

She replied, "I know."

On the return trip the promised storm blew up with unexpected force. There was intense excitement, for the one essential requirement

for a long journey to the north was at hand. "This storm will blow for days!" Teroro assured his men. The journey home was difficult, but at daybreak it became possible to turn and run before the wind into the lagoon. As they reached its protection Teroro drilled his men in the story they must tell: "We took *West-Wind* for a trial, but the storm came up. So we stopped at Havaiki." He added, "In this storm no one from Havaiki would dare come here with the true story."

"What about the girl?" Pa asked. "She'll betray us."

"She won't. We'll say that while we were in the channel I went ashore to get her for the journey north."

As the canoe neared shore, Mato cried, "What a storm! We went all the way to Havaiki."

Of all the listeners, only Marama knew the full significance of this statement: that some great revenge had been carried out.

Pa called, "Teroro got a girl to take north with him!"

From the bottom of the hull, where she had lain hidden, Tehani slowly rose, and it was in this way, with the west wind of the storm beating in her face, that Marama learned she would not be accompanying Teroro to the north. No sound escaped her lips. She stood in the wind with both hands pressed against her sides, her hair whipping about her shoulders, her great placid face, handsome as a moon on the thirteenth night, staring at the stranger in the canoe. "She is beautiful and her body is well formed," she thought. "Perhaps she can have children. Perhaps it is better." But then she looked at Teroro, and her heart broke. Hiding her tears, she turned to go home, but her husband called, "Marama!" She returned to the canoe and he said, "Take Tehani home," and Marama reached down and took the girl's hand and led her home.

IN ITS second night the storm rose to an intensity that precluded departure on the day planned. As the winds howled, those responsible for the voyage had a few last hours free for dreaming. The visions of Teroro were agitated; and towards dawn he saw two women standing by *West-Wind*, and the canoe had no mast on which to hang its sail. He awoke in fright, and then realized that the two women were Marama and Tehani; the dream signified only that each wanted to go north with him. He woke Marama, explaining, "Marama, the king will allow

me only one woman. He insisted that I take one younger than you."

"Tupuna explained," she said dully.

"It isn't that I've grown tired of you," he whispered. He fell asleep, and again saw his canoe with no mast, and this time the two women spoke, Marama in a deep voice crying, "I am Tane!" and Tehani singing in a lilting voice, "I am Ta'aroa!"

Teroro rose trembling in the grey light of dawn, while winds howled and drove rain across the island, and hurried, almost naked, to the hut of old Tupuna. The priest sat gathering his wisdom while Teroro described his dream. Finally he announced: "It is very clear, Teroro. When Tane, who rules the land, and Ta'aroa, who rules the sea, speak to a navigator in unison, they must be referring to the element that they rule together, the wind. There was no mast in your dream canoe. Therefore the gods wish you to take down your single mast and to raise instead two masts, and sails, one in each hull, so that you can catch the wind better." So Teroro called his men together, ripped down the mast, found a matching tree, and erected one in the right hull, which he named Tane, and one in the left, which he called Ta'aroa.

On the third night of the storm it was the king's turn to dream and he witnessed a fearful sight: two planets in the western sky at sunset, fighting with the sun and pushing it from the sky, whereupon one planet moved anxiously east and west, while the other roamed north and south. This was so ominous that the king summoned his uncle immediately. "Uncle," he said, "does this mean we are doomed?"

"No," Tupuna assured him. "I've studied every omen. There is no indication of failure. These searching stars are, I'll confess, not a good omen. But I am sure that all it means is that in some manner your preparation for the voyage is incomplete. You must unpack everything and then repack it. Then you will know what oversight has displeased the gods."

And so, before the king's eye, the boat's crew unwrapped and repacked each item that was to go north with them. "Have we our tools?" Tamatoa inquired, and his men brought forth the basalt stones used for cooking; bundles of sticks, some hard, some pithy, for making fire; fish-lines of sennit, fish-hooks of pearl, nets and spears for sharks; bluish-green adzes, stone chisels, pounders for crushing taro or making cloth from bark; digging sticks, harder than many stones, for planting taro;

gourds, calabashes and cups for cooking. They hauled in bows and arrows, and sling-shots; a long pole with sticky gum for catching birds, a conch shell for calling to prayer, and four heavy stones to serve as sea anchors. There were balers and paddles and extra mats to use as sails. During the passage of a thousand years these wandering island people had, without the assistance of any metal or clay, perfected an intricate civilization and its tools. In one double canoe they were now ready to establish that culture on a distant island.

"Have we cared for the plants and animals?" the king next inquired. Tenderly, the farmers unwrapped the seed-things that would sustain life in new lands. Taro corns were kept dry inside pandanus leaves until they could be planted for a new harvest. Banana shoots were wrapped in damp leaves, while choice coco-nuts were kept dry lest they launch their shoots. Sugar cane had been cut into joints and was kept inside dark bundles made of leaves.

"Where is the breadfruit?" Tamatoa asked, and four men dragged on to the mat large bundles swathed in leaves and mud. These contained the breadfruit shoots, most delicate of the cargo.

Men now hauled in two squealing sows and a boar, then two bitch dogs and a male, two chickens and a rooster. "Have we feed for these animals?" the king inquired and he was shown bags of dried coco-nut, sweet potatoes and dried fish. "Place these living things before me, and their food," Tamatoa commanded, and when the assemblage was completed he cried in a terrifying voice, "These are taboo!"

In solemn chant the witnesses repeated, "These are taboo!" Then Tupuna blessed them with long prayers of fertility, ending again, "These are taboo!" It was a divine inhibition. A man on this trip could see his woman die of starvation, but he could not hand her one morsel of the taboo food, nor eat any himself, for without this seed even those who did reach land would perish.

Teroro brought in the rations for the trip: partially dried breadfruit; pandanus flour, just barely palatable but useful on long trips; dried sweet potatoes, shellfish, coco-nut meat and bonito; more than eighty drinking coco-nuts; three dozen lengths of bamboo filled with clear water. When the food was assembled, Tamatoa studied it apprehensively. "Have we enough?" he asked.

"Our people have been starving themselves for weeks and drinking

barely a cup of water a day," Teroro said. "We can live on nothing."

"Are your fishermen prepared to catch us food along the way?"

"They have prayed to Ta'aroa. There will be fish."

"Then let us bless this food," Tamatoa said, and Tupuna recited the long chant which dedicated these rations to the gods.

"Let us check the canoe," the king said. He led his subjects out into the storm, and they went over each portion of *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*. Each hull of the double canoe was made by butting together three separate sections of hollowed-out tree, each section about twenty-five feet long. The sections were tied together with sennit at the joints, and it was these joints that the king now inspected. They leaked, of course, and without constant baling the canoe would sink, but they did not leak much, and the canoe was as rigid as if carved from a single log. The hulls were held together, about four feet apart, by eleven stout beams, again bound by powerful sennit; and to the beams was lashed the long, solid platform upon which the passengers and the gods would ride. This left, in each hull, a narrow space between the edge of the platform and the outer edge of the hull for the paddlers.

"The canoe is sound," Teroro assured his brother, and Tamatoa said, "If the omens are good, we will leave tomorrow at dusk. We must be at sea when the stars rise."

When the others had gone, Tamatoa said disconsolately to Tupuna, "What have we overlooked, Tupuna?"

"I saw nothing missing," the old man said. "But I noticed that, after the inspection, each man tied his bundles up a little more tightly. At the canoe they fastened the sennit a bit more strongly. Perhaps the gods wanted us not to forget the last effort that ensures success. Let us dream one more night."

ON THE fourth night of the storm all men who would make the voyage assembled at the temple, there to acquire their last flow of *mana* and to sleep in terror, awaiting omens that would lay bare the future. Again Teroro dreamed of his canoe, and again Marama was Tane and Tehani was Ta'aroa, and then each woman was transformed into a mast; so the omen was obviously hopeful. Teroro was so pleased that he risked a powerful taboo, crept out of the temple and went to the bed of Marama. In the darkness, she wept, and he consoled her by taking

the length of sennit he had picked up at the temple in Havaiki and, leading her out into the storm, he upturned a rock and carefully placed the sennit under it. "When I have gone for a year, turn the rock aside and you'll know whether I survived," for if the sennit lay straight the canoe had reached land; but if it were twisted

But the dream that actually launched the voyage came to old Tupuna. He saw in a dream-spun heaven a rainbow standing in the path the canoe must take, and as he watched, Tane and Ta'aroa lifted the rainbow and placed it abaft the canoe, where it shone brilliantly on the waters. The omen was so auspicious that in the morning, suffused with delight, he told the king, "We sail tonight!"

He went straight to the altar and took down the final precious essentials for the journey: one stone was black and white with flecks of yellow, and round, the size of a fist—it was Tane; the other stone was long and thin and greenish—it was Ta'aroa, god of the oceans on whom they must now depend. Tupuna wrapped each deity in a cloth made of yellow feathers and went to the canoe. In a small grass hut erected on the platform just abaft the masts, he placed Tane towards the right mast and Ta'aroa towards the left. The canoe could now be loaded.

Aft of the gods' house was an open space which Tupuna would occupy during the entire voyage, tending the deities. Behind him was sleeping space for the members of the crew, and behind them a grass hut for the women on the voyage. Aft of them sat Natabu, silent and sacred, accompanied by old Teura, the wife of Tupuna and seer of the voyage, who could read omens. At the rear of the house sat Tamatoa, beside a doorway from which he could watch the stars and check the steersman. The captaincy of the canoe lay with Teroro, who stood farthest forward with Tehani at his side; but the life and death of this bold adventure rested with the king. Only he could say turn or stay.

As the stormy day progressed it seemed inconceivable that any sensible man would venture outside the reef, but all knew that only in such a westerly gale could a canoe go forth with much chance of success. So the voyagers spent the day in prayer and in stowing the canoe. The slaves, animals and heavier bundles went into the left-hand hull, whose lead paddler would be Mato, upon whom the beat and rhythm would depend. Into the right-hand went the food, the trees and roots and the extra mats. This would be headed by Pa. At the rear, the steersman

Hiro would stand. The crew said good-bye to their wives and children, and Teroro went for the last time to see Marama. She was dressed in her finest tapa, her hair marked with flowers. "Guide the canoe well, Teroro," she said softly. "I shall pray for you."

"You will always be in my heart," he promised.

"No," she corrected. "When you are gone you must forget me. It would not be fair to Tehani."

"You are my wisdom, Marama," he said sorrowfully. "When I see things clearly it is always because you show me the way."

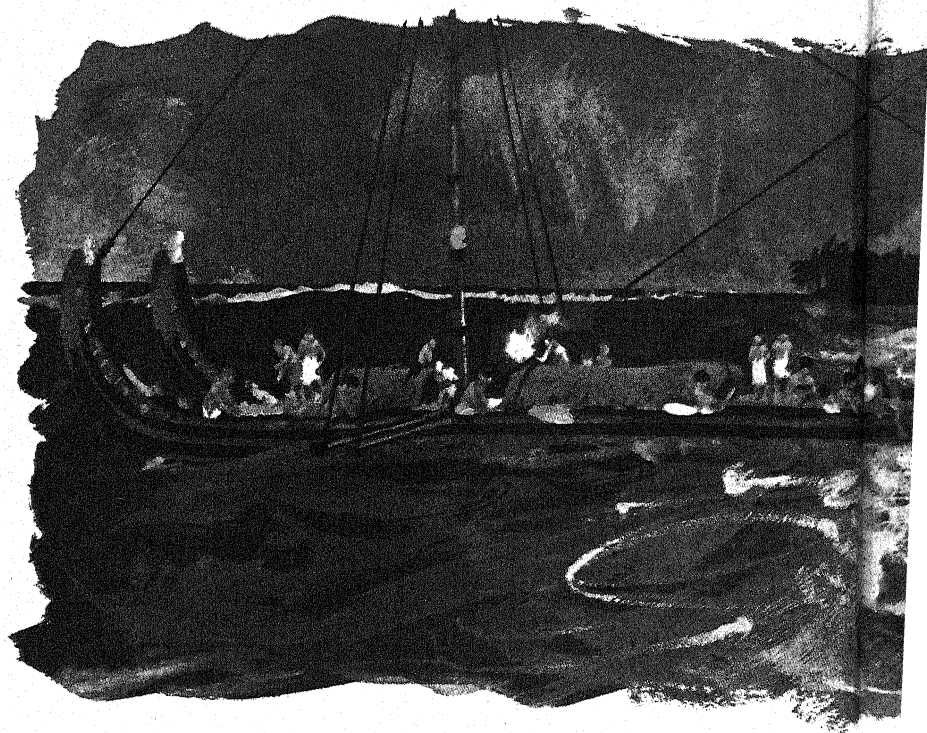
They sat on the matting for the last time and she tried to share with him all the things she had forgotten to tell him. "Never go against the counsel of Mato. He sometimes seems stupid because he comes from the north side of the island, but trust him. If you get into a fight, rely on Pa. Listen to Tupuna. His teeth are yellow with wisdom."

As the time came when Teroro was forced to go she thought: "There is so much more he needs to know." When he took his first step towards the door she fell on the matting and kissed his ankles, and heard him say haltingly, "Marama, when we sail, please don't come on shore," at which she rose and cried sharply, "Me! Stay hidden indoors? This is my canoe. I am the spirit of the sails and the strength of the paddlers. I will take you to land, Teroro, for I am the canoe." And when the men climbed aboard *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, Marama blessed them, and said to Tehani, "Take care of our husband. Fill him with love."

But at the last minute Marama was thrust aside by a most unexpected arrival. It was the High Priest, come down to the launching with a long retinue of assistants, and he went to the canoe and cried, "Great Oro bids you safe journey!"

Grabbing hold of the bowsprit, he stepped aboard. He knelt before the gods' house, pushed aside the grass door and deposited inside a statue of Oro, made of sacred sennit woven with his own hands. Then he cried into the storm, "Great Oro, bless this canoe!" And as he stepped ashore, Teroro saw that a smile of enormous relief had come upon the face of his new wife, Tehani. Now that Oro was with her, she knew the journey would succeed.

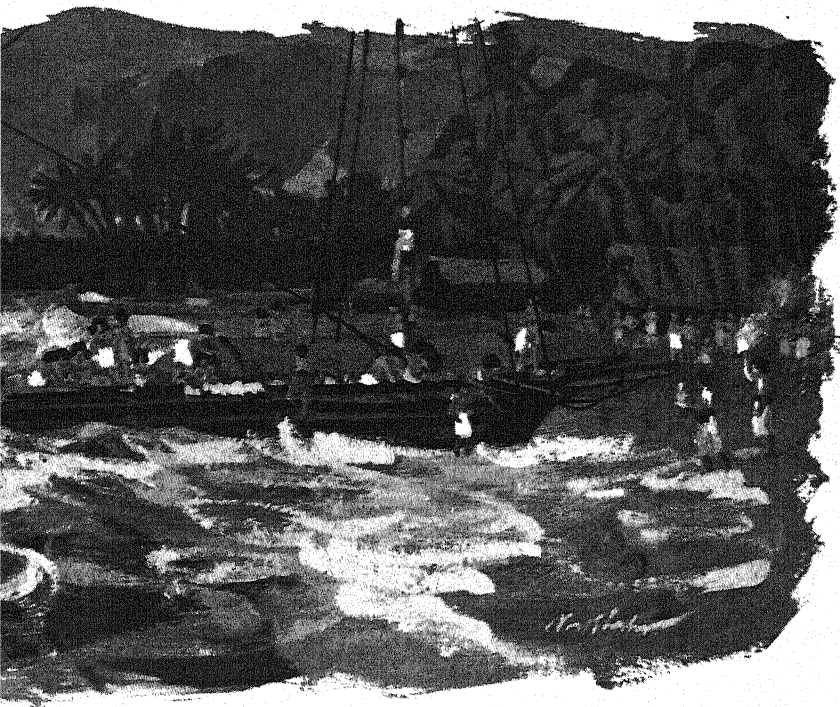
And so the canoe, *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, loaded and creaking with king and slave, with contradictory gods, with hope and fear, set forth upon the unknown. At the prow stood Teroro, ill-named the wise one,



but at this fateful moment he was wise enough not to look back at Bora Bora, for he would have seen Marama, and that sight he could not have borne.

When *West-Wind* reached the reef all in the canoe experienced a moment of awful dread, for outside the coral barrier roared the storm on slashing waves and tremendous deeps. Just for an instant Mato whispered, "Great Tane! Such waves!" Then with prodigious force he led the paddlers into a swift rhythm that bore them directly into the heart of the storm. The canoe rose high in the sea, teetered a moment with its shrouds whistling, then ripped down, down into the valley of the waves. Spray dashed across all heads and the two halves seemed as if they must tear apart. Pigs squealed in terror and dogs barked, while in the flooded grass house women thought: "This is death."

But instantly the powerful canoe cut into the waves, found itself, and



rode high on to the crest of the ocean, away from Bora Bora, away from the comforting lagoon and on to the highway that led to nothingness.

LATER AGES would depict these men as all-wise and heroic, great venturers seeking bright new lands; but such myths would be in error. Had King Tamatoa and his people been more clever, they would have held their homeland. Had they perceived the deeper nature of gods, they would never have fallen prey to a savage deity who tormented them. But they were stubborn rather than wise, and the false god expelled them. Yet, as these defeated people swept into the storm, each carried his own personal god of courage. For Teroro it was the mighty albatross that winged its way over distant seas. For Tamatoa it was the wind that spoke to him in tempests. For Tupuna it was the spirit of the lagoon that brought fish. And for his wife, Teura, the keeper of omens,

it was a god so powerful that she scarcely dared mention its name. But it followed her in the ocean, her great and sweet and powerful deity, her courage in the unknown.

When they had reached, more swiftly than ever before, a point off the north coast of Havaiki, Teroro precariously made his way aft to consult with his brother, laying bare a wish that startled the king: "I cannot sail with Oro in this canoe. Let us throw him into the ocean."

"A god!"

"I cannot sail with him."

Tamatoa summoned old Tupuna. "Teroro wants to throw Oro into the ocean," he explained.

"We have suffered enough from Oro," Teroro said to the old man. "My men cannot sail this canoe with such a burden."

"It must not be done!" Tupuna warned. "The ocean would open and swallow us. Seaweed would grow in our hair."

"You say Oro will punish us?" Teroro cried. "I say this to Oro." And he flung his head back howling into the wind, "Oro, by the bodies of all men sacrificed to you, I condemn you. I curse you and cast excrement in your face. Now, if you control the storm, raise your bloodstained hands and strike me down." He stood motionless as the others listened in horror, waiting. When nothing happened he stumbled forward in the storm, but when he reached the gods' house inherited fears paralysed him. Accompanied now by Mato, he returned to the rear. "I cannot act without your approval, brother. You are my king."

Tamatoa cried, "We shall be lost if we destroy a god."

Teroro fell on the platform and clutched his brother's feet. "Command me to destroy this evil thing."

"Don't do it, Tamatoa!" his uncle warned.

In this moment of indecision, when the ultimate values of the canoe were laid open on the stormy deck, it was tough Mato who acted. He shouted, "King Tamatoa, if we take Oro with us, when you land you will kill more people to show him gratitude for bringing us there. And once started, we will kill more, and more." He rushed to the gods' house, uncovered the sennit form of the avenging god and raised it high into the storm. "Go back to Havaiki where you came from!" he shouted. "You've eaten our men. You've driven us from the home of our ancestors. Go away!" And with a vast sweep of his arm, he threw the god far

out to sea. But winds caught at the feathers and for an awful moment held the god aloft, so that it kept pace with the canoe. "*Auwe!*" shrieked the priest. "*Auwe!* See, Oro follows us!"

King Tamatoa, perceiving this miracle, fell to the platform in prayer, but Teroro, awakened from his indecision, grabbed a spear and with fury launched it at the god. It missed, but the shaft brushed the figure and deflected it into the deep. Calmly, he turned to the prostrate king and said, "I have killed the god. You may do with me as you wish."

"Go to the your post," the king mumbled, stricken with fear.

Then Teroro knelt beside Tehani. "Forgive me. I killed your father and now I have killed your god. I will never offend you again." Bereft of the very foundations of her being, the girl could say nothing; but from then on Teroro treated her with special kindness.

Then Tane and Ta'aroa conspired to present them with an omen that erased from all hearts memories of what had just happened. The rain came heavily for fifteen minutes, followed by strong winds that blew clouds scudding ahead in darkness until the clouds parted and the stars were momentarily revealed.

Then it was that the wisdom of Tupuna in setting forth at dusk on the new day of the month became apparent, for there, rising in the eastern sky, and with no bright moon in competition, sparkled the Seven Little Eyes. It was their first twilight appearance of the year, their reassuring return which proved that the world would continue for at least twelve more months. With extraordinary joy the voyagers greeted the Little Eyes. From the grass house women came forth and filled their hearts with comfort, the paddlers found new resilience in their tired muscles and Teroro knew that he was on course.

Then, the miracle vouchsafed, Tane drew the clouds across once more and the storm continued; but contentment beyond measure settled upon the canoe, for it was at last apparent that the company moved in accordance with divine laws. How sweet the roar of the wind that bore them on, how consoling the motion of the waves that carried them into the unknown; how appropriate the world, how well ordered and secure the heavens! On the canoe, that daring and insignificant bundle of wood lashed together by sennit and men's wills, all hearts were deep in peace; and when old Tupuna crawled back to his watching point abaft the gods' house he called softly to Teroro, "The king is content.

The omen proves that Oro was caught by Ta'aroa and conveyed safely to Havaiki. All is well." And the canoe moved on.

THE MOST critical part of any twenty-four-hour period came in the half-hour just before dawn, for unless the navigator could catch a glimpse of some known star and thus check course he would have to proceed through an entire day with only the sun to steer by; and while it was true that master astronomers like Teroro and Tupuna could follow each movement of the sun and take from it their heading, they could not use it to determine their latitude. For that they depended upon the stars.

After their first fleeting glimpse of the Seven Little Eyes, Teroro and his uncle waited anxiously for Three-in-a-Row, which distant astronomers had already named Orion's Belt, for the sailing directions said that these stars hung over Nuku Hiva, their replenishment point. But Three-in-a-Row did not appear and with the coming of the dull grey dawn Teroro and Tupuna still did not know where they were.

For three stormy days and starless nights the canoe ran with the storm. Old Teura studied the omens during the day. In nearly two-thirds of a century of living with the gods, she had unravelled many of their tricky ways. Now she watched how Ta'aroa moved the waves, how the spume rose, how the tips fell away and in what manner they tumbled back into the troughs. A bit of bark, washed out to sea days before from Havaiki, was of particular interest to the old woman, for it proved that the ocean had a northerly set, though the wind blew more towards the north-east. But most of all the old seer studied the sun; although it was masked behind layers of cloud, her practised eye could mark its motion. And when she placed her observations of it beside her deductions from earlier omens she concluded: "Those men don't know where they are! We're far to the north of our course!"

But what Teura particularly appreciated were those unexpected messages from the gods which meant so much to the knowing. For example, an albatross happened to fly past the canoe and she saw with gratification that he kept to the left, or Ta'aroa's side. Since the bird was known to be a creature of Ta'aroa this was a refreshing omen; but when he returned to the canoe, also from the left side, and finally perched on the left mast, with his left foot extended, the coincidence

could no longer be termed an omen. It was a message that the god of the oceans had personally sent to an old woman who had long honoured him. Contentedly, the old woman added this to other good omens. The men might be lost, and the stars remain hidden, and the storm continue, but Ta'aroa was with them and all was well.

In the late afternoon, Tupuna and Teroro came aft to find out from Teura where they were. She advised them that they rode far to the north and must turn to get to Nuku Hiva.

"No," the men said, "directions don't call for a turn yet. Wait till the stars come out. You'll see we're on course."

But still no stars appeared, and Teroro steered solely by running directly before the wind, trusting that the storm was steady and not blowing in circles, and hoisting the sails to take full advantage of it. More than a century ago a wise man had named an earlier canoe *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* because he had found that when Bora Borans went forth driven by the western hurricane they went well. Until the stars proved the contrary, Teroro was willing to abide by this ancient wisdom. He was somewhat shaken, however, on the fifth night of the voyage—the ninth since the storm had risen—when Tupuna crept to the prow and whispered, "I have never known a storm from the west to blow so long. It surely must have veered."

There was a long pause. Teroro looked down at the slim body of Tehani, curled against the mast. He wondered what she would say to this problem, but she was not like Marama; she had no ideas. He wrestled with the alternatives and felt irritated when Tupuna pressed him: "Can you recall such a constant wind?"

"No," Teroro snapped, and the two men parted.

Towards dawn of the next day, when it seemed probable that no stars would show, Tupuna became frightened: "We must drop the sails. We don't know where we are." He insisted upon a conference with the king and Teura, which produced three voices against Teroro, for it was obvious that the canoe was lost.

"But Ta'aroa sent his albatross to us," Teroro said. "I am not lost, because I am riding with the desires of Ta'aroa."

"Do you know how to get to Nuku Hiva?"

Then Teroro broached his bold plan. He looked at each of his companions and replied, "If we are concerned only with Nuku Hiva, I am

lost. But what is there for us in Nuku Hiva? To get fresh water and food there we would have to fight. Hasn't Ta'aroa sent us fresh fish in abundance? Have we not disciplined ourselves, so that each man eats only a shred each day? In all sense, brother, if the storm is with us, do we need to go to Nuku Hiva?"

Tamatoa resisted his brother's eloquence and asked, "Then you are lost. You can't take us to Nuku Hiva?"

"No. But I can take you to the north."

As if in support of his bold plan, a sudden force of wind ripped across the waves, whipping the canoe along in a burst of speed. Spray leaped, and dawn, still blotting out the stars and all certain knowledge, came upon the men of Bora Bora.

"We are alone on the sea," Teroro said solemnly. "We are engaged in a special voyage, and if it takes us past Nuku Hiva then I say good, for we are doubtless being sped by the gods on some great mission. Brother, I beg you, let us keep the sails aloft."

The king would not present this dangerous request for the opinions of Tupuna and Teura. He knew they would insist upon caution, and he suspected that perhaps caution was not now required. Weighing all possibilities, he sided with his brother.

So, for two more nights, the canoe sped on, safe in the arms of Ta'aroa; and then on the afternoon of the seventh day an event of transcendent importance occurred. A shark appeared not far from the canoe and followed it lazily for a moment, trying to catch Teura's attention, and when she saw it her heart cried with joy, for this great blue beast of the sea had long been her personal god. While the others were blind with their work, it swam along the left side of the canoe, its blue head above the waves. "Are you lost, Teura?" it inquired softly.

"Yes, Mano," she replied, "we are lost."

"Are you searching for Nuku Hiva?" the shark asked.

"Yes. I have said that it was . . ."

"You will not see Nuku Hiva," the great blue shark advised. "It is far to the south."

"What shall we do, Mano?"

"Tonight there will be stars, Teura," the shark whispered. "All the stars that you require."

In perfect contentment the old woman closed her tired eyes. "I have

waited for you for many days," she said softly. "But I did not feel lost, Mano, for I knew you must be watching us."

"I have been following," the shark said. "Your men were brave, Teura, to keep the sails aloft. You are on the right course. You will see when the stars come out." And with this assurance, he turned away from the canoe. The old woman said to Tamatoa, "Tonight there will be stars." And as she spoke two land birds with brown-tipped wings flew purposefully towards the south and Tamatoa saw them and asked, "Does that mean that Nuku Hiva is far to the south?"

"We shall never see it, Tamatoa, for we are safe on a new heading. You will see when the stars come out."

WITH EXCITED apprehension Tupuna and Teroro waited for the dusk. They knew that when the Seven Little Eyes peeped above the eastern horizon the canoe's course would be apparent; and when Three-in-a-Row appeared they could deduce where Nuku Hiva lay.

Exactly as Teura had predicted, towards dusk the clouds disappeared, and as the sun sank exhilaration filled the canoe, for trailing the sun was the bright star of evening, soon accompanied by a second wandering star of great brilliance. Like the two gods on whom the canoe depended, the planets marched grandly towards the rim of the ocean and vanished in their appointed pits of heaven. Then, as darkness deepened over the still heaving ocean and the winds died momentarily from the gallant outstretched sails, the stars began to appear; first the mighty golden stars of the south, those warm familiar beacons that showed the way to Tahiti, followed by the cold blue stars of the north, scintillating in their accustomed places. As each star took its position, its friends in the canoe greeted it with cries of recognition and an assurance that had been absent for many days returned.

The critical stars had not yet risen, so that in spite of their joy men could not suppress the question, "What if the Little Eyes do not rise here?" Then slowly and uncertainly, for they were not brilliant stars, the sacred group arose, precisely where it should have been. "The Little Eyes are still with us!" Tupuna shouted, and the king offered a prayer to the guardians of the world, the core round which the heavens were built. The astronomers then met to read the signs, and they concluded that there had been, as Teura had guessed, a definite drift northward;

for the Little Eyes were going to culminate much higher in the heavens than would be proper were the canoe on course to Nuku Hiva. To say how serious the drift had been they would have to wait until Three-in-a-Row appeared.

So the navigators waited for another two hours and then when Three-in-a-Row was well up into the heavens it became evident that the canoe was far, far north of the course to Nuku Hiva and was thus committed to an unknown ocean with no opportunity to replenish stores. It was a solemn group that went aft to report to the king: "The storm has carried us even more swiftly than Teroro imagined."

The king's face showed his distress. "Are we lost?"

"No, we are not," Tupuna said carefully. "We seek lands which lie beneath the Seven Little Eyes, and we are nearer to them than we had a right to expect. If we do not eat too much . . ."

"We could still alter course and find Nuku Hiva," Tamatoa said.

Teroro remained silent and allowed old Tupuna to carry the argument: "No, we are well on our way."

"But to where?"

Tupuna repeated the only chant he had ever memorized for sailing to the north. In effect it said: "Keep the canoe headed with the storm until the winds cease. Then turn into the dead sea where bones rot with heat and no wind blows. Paddle to the new star and, when winds strike from the east, ride with them westward until land beneath the Seven Little Eyes is found."

The king, himself an adequate astronomer, pointed north and asked, "Then the lands we seek are there?"

"Yes," Tupuna agreed.

"But we go this way?" and he pointed eastward, where the winds of the dying storm were driving them.

"Yes."

The course seemed so improbable that the king cried, "But why . . . ?"

"Because the only knowledge we have says that this is the way to do it."

The king, ever mindful of the fact that fifty-seven people were in his care, grasped Tupuna by the shoulders and asked him bluntly, "What do you honestly think about the land that is supposed to be under the Little Eyes?"

The old man replied, "I think that many canoes have left these waters, some blown by storms, others like us in exile. Whether these canoes reached land or not, we do not know. But some man, with a vision of what might be, composed that chant."

"Then we are sailing with a dream for our guide?"

"Yes," the priest answered.

THE REAPPEARANCE of the stars had so excited the paddlers and the women that, even while the astronomers were consulting, shark-faced Pa had handed his paddle to another and grabbed a length of tapa which he had wrapped round his shoulders, masking his head. Now, imitating a very fat man, he pranced up and down the platform, shouting, "Who am I?"

"He's Tatai, the headless king of Bora Bora!" Mato cried.

In wild burlesque, Pa ridiculed the coronation of the headless would-be king. Paddlers stopped and began to beat rhythms on the canoe, and a woman produced a little drum with a high, almost metallic sound, and the night's revelry was launched.

"What is this new dance?" the king asked Teroro.

His brother said hesitantly, "Pa is . . . Well, some of us heard that fat Tatai was to be king after we left. And . . ."

"And now Tatai has no head. You could have ruined the entire voyage."

"We could have, but we knew that Tatai's village would not come over to Bora Bora very soon. . . ."

"Why not?"

"Well, when we left there wasn't any village."

In the light of the quarter-moon King Tamatoa looked at his daring young brother. He himself might have sought revenge, but he had been afraid of endangering the voyage. But Teroro had not been afraid. There was much that he would have said, but the sound of ancient drumming stifled logical thought, and with a stirring leap he whirled forward to where Pa was dancing and entered into the ritual dance of the kings of Bora Bora. Like a boy, he gestured and postured until towards the end he grabbed Pa's tapa and threw it over his head and with demonic energy leaped into the now popular dance of the headless king from Havaiki, shouting, "I dance in honour of brave men! Let's

have the celebration you were denied!" And he ordered extra rations of food, more drums, and all the water anyone wanted.

Like children careless of the dawn, they revelled through the night, got drunk on laughter, and feasted on food that should have been conserved. When, one by one, in savage triumph, they rose and screamed classic island insults at the vanquished, Teroro happened to look forward to where Tehani huddled against a mast, weeping as her father was reviled. And then he saw Mato touch the girl's hand in tender sympathy. "This is the way of victory," Mato said. "Forgive us."

In the rainy dawn Tamatoa took gloomy stock of what the celebration had cost. Contritely, he issued orders that what had been wasted must be made up in austerity. "Though we have plenty of water," he warned, "each must drink only a cupful a day."

So, with the remnants of the tempest at their backs and victory in their hearts, the voyagers sailed eastward for the ninth night, and the tenth, and the fifteenth. Their swift canoe, fleetest large craft that ever up to then had plied the oceans, averaged two hundred miles a day, better than eight miles an hour, day after day. They sailed more than half-way to the lands where Aztecs were building mighty temples, and well on to the approaches of the northern land where Cheyennes and Apaches built nothing.

Day was the enemy, crowded with uncertainty and the hourly acknowledgment of their forlorn position; but nightfall brought consolation. How tremendous an experience at the end of a long day to discover, in the west, the evening star and its wandering companion, and out of the vastness to see the Little Eyes come peeping with their message: "You are coming closer to the land we guard." How marvellous, how marvellous the night!

As the canoe reached eastward and the storm abated, the daily routine became more settled. Each dawn the slaves stopped bailing and cleaned out the canoe, while farmers fed the animals. The paddlers then had to be fed, and this left little for the women, who, at every opportunity, set fishing-lines and tended them carefully. The first fish they caught went to the king and Teroro, the next to Tupuna and Teura, the next four to the paddlers, the seventh and eighth to the pigs, the ninth to the dogs, the tenth to the chickens. If there were more, the women could eat.

With great niggardliness, the prepared foods were doled out, but soon

the poi, the master food of the islands, was finished and the bundles of breadfruit diminished. Even the abundant rain ceased and Tamatoa had to reduce rations still further, until the crew were getting only two mouthfuls of food, two small portions of water. Women and slaves got half as much, so that, unless they could land bonito, or trap water in the sails, all existed at the starvation level. Often, just when their tongues were parched and their bodies scorched with heat, when their whole being craved only water, a squall passed a mile to the left or right, dumping untold quantities of water upon the sea. But not even an expert navigator like Teroro could anticipate the vagaries of a rain squall and intercept it; all he could do was to plod patiently on, his lips burning with desire, trying to ignore the cascades of water that were being dumped out of reach.

On a voyage such as this, sexual contact was taboo, but this did not keep the king from gazing often at his stately wife, Natabu; and old Tupuna saw to it that Teura got some of his food; and in the heat of day Tehani would dip a length of tapa into the sea and press it over her husband's sleeping form. At night, when the stars were known and the course set, Teroro would often sit quietly beside Tehani and talk with her, and although she rarely had much to say the two did grow to respect and treasure each other.

But the most curious thoughts between men and women involved the twelve unassigned women and the thirty-four unattached men. Some of these women were already married, but it was understood that upon landing they would accept as additional husbands two or three of the men who had no wives. So on the long voyage men with no women began cautiously to form close friendships with men who had women, establishing a congenial group of three or four who would later share one wife; or the men studied the unmarried women to decide which one could most satisfactorily be shared with one's group. Soon, without anything definite having been said, it was remarkably well understood that this woman and these three men would build a house for themselves and raise common children, or that the husband and wife would accept those two friends of the man into complete intimacy, thus populating the new land. It was further understood that each woman, until she reached the age when children no longer came, would be kept continuously pregnant.

ONE NIGHT an event occurred which, in its impact upon a people who lived by the stars, had no equal on this voyage. As the *West-Wind* crept north it became obvious to the astronomers on board that they must lose sight for ever of many familiar stars which lay below what would later be called the Southern Cross. With sorrow Tupuna would follow some star which as a boy he had loved, and watch it vanish into the perpetual pit of the sky from which stars no more rise. Whole constellations were washed into the sea, never to be seen again.

Although this was cause for regret, it did not occasion alarm, for the men of Bora Bora were exceptional astronomers. They had developed, from careful observation, a year of twelve months and three hundred and sixty-five days, founded on the sun. They could predict with accuracy the new appearance and subsequent motion of the planets, and so they were prepared, as they sailed north, to lose some stars that were familiar, and to come upon some that were new.

On the eleventh night Tupuna saw, bobbing above the waves in the north, a new star, not of maximum brightness like the vast beacons of the south—for the voyagers found the northern stars rather disappointing in brilliance—but nevertheless an interesting newcomer. "See how it lies in a direct line from the two stars in Bird-with-a-Long-Neck," the old man pointed out, referring to stars which others called the Big Dipper. At first Teroro could not catch the bright star, for it danced up and down on the horizon, now visible above the waves, now lost. Then he saw it: a bright, clean, cold star, well marked in an empty space of the sky. Speaking as a navigator, he said, "That would be a strong star to steer by . . . when it rises a little higher."

Tupuna observed, "We must watch carefully, the next few nights, to see which pit of heaven it goes into."

So on the twelfth night the two men studied the new guidepost, but as dawn appeared each was afraid to tell the other what he had seen, for each realized that he had stumbled upon an omen of such magnitude that it did not bear speaking of.

The next evening at six the sun left the sky and the stars began to appear. There were the Seven Little Eyes, blessing the canoe, and later Three-in-a-Row, now well to the south, and the very bright stars of Tahiti; but what the men watched was only the strange new star. For nine hours they studied it, unwilling to come to the conclusion that was

inescapable. But when they had triangulated the sky in every known way, when they had proved their frightening thesis beyond doubt, they were forced, each working by himself, to the terrifying conclusion. It was Tupuna who put it into words: "The new star does not move."

"It is fixed," Teroro agreed, using this word in a new meaning. They knew the bright wandering planets that moved in and out of the constellations and they had always contrasted these with the fixed stars; but they realized that in a grand sense the latter also moved, rising out of pits in the east and falling into the pits of the west. There were a few that never disappeared below the waves, but all the stars they knew moved through the heavens. The new star did not.

"We had better consult with the king," Tupuna advised, but when they went aft they found Tamatoa sleeping, and no man would dare waken another suddenly, lest the sleeper's spirit be out wandering and have no time to slip back in through the corner of the eye. A man without a spirit would go mad. Finally Tupuna grew nervous, holding as he did the news of the ominous fixed star. He went outside the grass house, took a paddle and tapped the side of the canoe, whereupon the king, like any captain who hears a strange noise aboard his ship, rolled uneasily, cleared his throat and gave his wandering spirit ample time to climb back into his eye. "What's happening?"

"An omen of terrible significance," Tupuna whispered. He showed Tamatoa the new star. "It does not move."

Anxiously, the three watched for an hour and then summoned old Teura, advising her: "Tane has set a star in the heavens which does not move. What can it signify?"

The old woman insisted upon an hour in which to study the phenomenon for herself. At the end of it, she said, haltingly, "Tane is the keeper of the stars. If he has placed this miracle before us, it is because he wishes to speak to us."

"Could it mean that Tane has put a barrier, fixed and immovable, before us?" Tamatoa asked.

"It would seem so," Teura said. "Else why would the star be set there, like a rock?"

Apprehension gripped them, for if Tane was against this voyage all must perish. They could not go back now. "And yet," Tupuna recalled, "the chant says that when the west wind dies, we are to paddle across

the sea of no wind towards a new star. Is this not the new star, fixed there for us to use?" The group decided this hopeful concept might have merit, and therefore that they should continue along the same course, consulting again at dusk the next day.

That night Teroro stood alone in the prow, studying the new star, and gradually a new idea germinated in his brain. Tentatively at first, and then with compelling intensity, he sensed that some grand design of the gods was making itself manifest. "If this star is immovable, it must hang at a known distance above the horizon. . . . No; what I mean is, for every island, this fixed star must hang at a known distance. . . . Start with Tahiti. We know exactly what stars stand directly over Tahiti at each hour of the night for each night of the year. Now if this star hangs there for ever, then every island must stand in some relationship to it. Therefore, once you see how high that star is, you know exactly how far north or south you must sail to find your island. If you can see the star, you will know! You will know!"

Suddenly, and with dazzling clarity, Teroro saw an entirely new system of navigation based on Tane's gift, the fixed star, and he thought: "Life must be sweet indeed for sailors in these waters! These heavens are fixed, and I shall be free to move beneath them." He looked happily to the west where the Little Eyes blinked at him, and he whispered to them, "The new land you lead us to must be sweet indeed if it exists in such an ordered ocean beneath such an ordered sky."

Up to now Teroro had given no one cause to think that he merited his name, the Brain; certainly he could never be a knowledgeable priest like Tupuna, nor had he wisdom in political counsels like his brother; but on this night he proved that he could do something that none of his companions could: he could look at the evidence planted in the universe and from it derive a new concept, and a greater thing than this no mind can accomplish. On what Teroro foresaw that night the navigation of the islands ahead would be built and their location in the ocean determined. Yet in his joy of discovery he experienced an emptiness, for Marama was absent and there was not much use talking about a thing like this with Tehani. Marama would have grasped the idea at once, but beautiful little Tehani would have looked at the heavens and asked, "What star?" It was curious the way in which Marama's last cry persisted in Teroro's ears: "I am the canoe!" She was, for she was the

on-going spirit of the canoe; it was her grave face that Teroro often saw ahead of him on the waves, and, when *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* in its swift flight overtook the vision in the waters, Marama smiled as the canoe swept past, and Teroro felt that all was well.

INTO THE arid doldrums they plunged. The hot sun beat upon them by day and the rainless stars mocked them at night.

Teroro planned so that Mato and Pa, the two sturdiest paddlers, would not work at the same time; also, after an hour's stint in the right hull, which tore the muscles of the left shoulder, the paddlers would shift sides and wear out their right shoulders. At each shift six men would drop out and rest. But onward the canoe went, constantly. From time to time the stronger women would take paddles, whereupon the shift was shortened to half an hour; while in the bottom of each hull the artisans and the slaves worked constantly, bailing the water that seeped in where the hull had been tied together.

It was ironic that in the storm, when fresh water was plentiful, the sails did most of the work; whereas now, when men sweated and strained endlessly, the water was doled out in ever decreasing portions. The women, with scarcely any, suffered miserably; the slaves were near death. The farmers had an especially cruel task. Tenderly they must open the mouth of a pig and drop water inside. The death of a farmer could be tolerated; the death of a pig would have been catastrophe.

Still the canoe bore on. At night Teroro, with his lips burning, would place on the platform near the prow half a coco-nut, filled with placid sea water, and in it he would catch the reflection of the fixed star, and by keeping this reflection constant in the cup he maintained his course.

At daybreak, Teura, her old body almost desiccated by the sun, would sit in the blazing heat and speculate upon the omens. "Red clouds in patches in the eastern sky bring rain, for certain," she recalled, but there were no clouds. At night the moon was as brilliant as a disk of polished *Tridacna*, with no ring round it, no omen of storm. Repeatedly Teura chanted: "Stand up, stand up, big wave from Tahiti. Blow down, blow down, great wind from Moorea." But in these new seas her invocations were powerless.

Hot nights were followed by days of remorseless heat; one woman died, and through the entire canoe there was a longing for the cool

valleys of Bora Bora. The only thing that seemed to live in the canoe was the dancing new star as it leaped about in Teroro's coco-nut cup. Then late one night as the navigator watched his star he saw on the horizon a breath of storm. It was small at first, and wavering, and Mato whispered, "Is that rain?" At first Teroro would not reply, and then, with a mighty shout, he roared into the night, "Rain!"

The grass house emptied. The sleeping paddlers wakened and watched as the wind rose, and a light capping of the sea could be seen in starlight. It must be a substantial storm. It was worth pursuing, and everyone began to paddle furiously. Those with no paddles used their hands, and even the king grabbed a bailing bucket from a slave and paddled with it. Through the night the canoe sped on, the men working desperately, the storm tantalizingly eluding them. As the blazing day came upon them, driving the clouds beyond the horizon, the paddlers, their strength exhausted, lay listless and allowed the sun to beat upon them. Old Tupuna was near death, and the pigs wept protestingly in the waterless heat.

Only the king was active. Sitting cross-legged on his mat he prayed ceaselessly. "Great Tane, I prefer you above all other gods. You have always given us taro and breadfruit in abundance and brought our pigs to fatness. I am loyal to you, Tane." He continued in this way for many minutes, reminding the deity of their past relationships; then, from the depths of despair, he pleaded: "Tane, bring us rain."

Old Teura, hearing the king praying, crept back to him, and the two wise people sat facing each other in bleak despair. Then Teura, her eyes already inflamed from watching the merciless sun, went out to the lifeless platform and prayed for omens, and as she gave her whole being to this duty the great blue shark came beside the canoe and whispered, "Are you afraid you will die, Teura?"

"Not for myself," she replied calmly. "I'm an old woman, Mano. But my two nephews"

"You haven't been watching the horizon," the shark admonished, "... to the left."

And as Teura looked, she saw a cloud, and then a disturbance ruffling the ashen sea, and then the movement of a storm, and rain. "Once before it looked the same," she whispered, afraid to believe.

"This time follow me," the shark cried, and then with a shimmering



leap he splashed down into the sea, her personal god, her salvation.

With a wild scream she cried, "Rain! Rain!" And all the sleepers rushed out to find a storm bearing down upon them.

"Our prayers are answered!" Tamatoa shouted. But old Teura, laughing madly as the benign water struck her face, saw in the heart of the storm her own god, Mano, his blue fin cutting the waves.

Almost as if by command, the near-dying voyagers threw off their clothes and stood naked, drinking in the divine storm. The sails came down and the mast of Ta'aroa was almost carried away, and the dogs whined, but the men in the canoe swept the water into their mouths and embraced each other. Into the night the storm continued, and it seemed as if the canoe must break apart, but no one called for the storm to abate. They fought it and drank it and washed their aching bodies with it, and sailed into the heart of it, and towards morning, exhausted in sheer joy, they watched as the clouds parted and they saw that they were almost under the path of the Seven Little Eyes, and they knew that they must ride with the easterly wind that had brought the storm. Their destination now lay somewhere to the west.

It was a long leg to windward they took. For nearly two thousand miles they ran before the easterlies, covering most days more than a hundred and fifty miles. It was now that Tamatoa's insistence on discipline preserved the voyage; food had run perilously low and for some perverse reason the numerous fish in these strange waters would not bite. Tupuna explained that it was because they lived under the influence of the fixed star and that the Bora Bora fish-hooks had not been adjusted to this new consideration.

There was a little coco-nut left and a small amount of breadfruit, but no taro. Even the pigs were famishing. But in this extremity the thirsty paddlers, their stomachs long since contracted into hard little fists, survived amazingly. Their strong shoulders, devoid now of even a trace of fat, seemed able to generate energy from nothing. With neither food nor adequate water, the men sweated little; through sun-reddened eyes they constantly scanned the horizon for omens.

It was Teura, on the twenty-seventh morning, who saw the first substantial sign: a small piece of driftwood. When it was pulled aboard it was found to contain four land worms, which were fed to the astonished

chickens. "It has been in the ocean less than ten days," Teura announced. Since the canoe could travel five or six times faster than a drifting branch, it seemed likely that land lay somewhere near; and Teura entered into a period of intense concentration, clutching at omens and interpreting them hopefully by means of old prayers.

Early on the twenty-ninth day, a group of eleven birds with handsome cleft tails flew by and Teroro noted with keen pleasure that their heading, reversed, was his. While he watched, they came upon a group of gannets diving for fish, and when those skilled fishers rose with their catch the fork-tailed birds swept down and attacked them, forcing the gannets to drop the fish, whereupon the foragers caught the morsels in mid-air and flew away. From their presence it could be deduced that land was not more than sixty miles distant, a fact confirmed when Teura detected in the waves a peculiar pattern that cut across the normal motion of the sea, indicating that in the near distance the westerly set of the ocean was striking a reef. A bank of cloud obscured the western horizon, but Teura chose the spot from which the wave echoes seemed to be generating and stared fixedly at it.

Towards dusk the clouds began to dissipate, and it was she who first saw the new island looming ahead. Gasping, she cried, "Oh, great Tane! What is it?" For there before them, rearing from the sea like an undreamed-of monster, rose a tremendous mountain more massive than they had ever imagined, crowned in strange white and soaring majestically into the sunset. "What a land we have found!" Teroro whispered.

"It is the land of Tane!" King Tamatoa announced in a hushed whisper. "It reaches to heaven itself." And all in the canoe, seeing this clean and wonderful mountain, fell silent and did it reverence, until Pa cried, "Look! It is smoking!" And as night fell, it was as if a gigantic mountain, hung in the heavens, sending fumes from its peak.

THE VISION haunted the voyagers, for they knew it must be an omen of some proportions, and in the night old Teura dreamed that a voice was crying out to her, "Teura, you have forgotten me." She woke screaming, and told the king her dream, concluding, "I know now what we forgot. I recognized the voice. We have left behind a goddess whom we should have brought."

Quaking in his heart, Tamatoa asked, "What goddess?" for he knew

that, if a goddess felt insulted, her capacity for revenge was limitless.

"It is the voice of Pere, the ancient goddess of Bora Bora."

They summoned Tupuna and told him the dream, and he acknowledged that it must have been Pere who had wanted to come on the voyage, whereupon his nephew asked, "But who is Pere?"

"In ancient days on Bora Bora," the old man explained as the moon rose in the east, "our island had mountains that smoked, and Pere was the goddess of flame who directed our lives. But the flame died away and we supposed that Pere had left us, and we no longer worshipped the red-coloured rock in the temple."

"And she is angry with us?" the king asked.

"Yes. But Tane and Ta'aroa are with us. They will protect us."

The old seers went back to their places, and the king was left alone, in the shadow of his new land now barely visible in the misty moonlight. He knew the rock of Pere. It had been retained in the temple though it was no longer even dressed in feathers. It would have been so simple to have brought it. He despaired that a man could take so much care to satisfy the gods, and nevertheless could fail.

FOR THE four terrified slaves in the rear of the left hull, a day of great terror was about to dawn, and with their two women they whispered of love and of the children they hoped the women would bear, even though those children would be slaves. For the four men knew that when the canoe landed a temple would be built, and when the four corner post-holes had been dug one of them would be buried alive in each, so that his spirit would for ever hold the temple securely aloft.

Their two women, soon to be abandoned, suffered as cruelly as the slaves, for they had come to love these gentle, kindly men, who for no ascertainable reason would be sacrificed. Then the women would have to live on the edge of their community, and, if they were already pregnant and their children were sons, they would be thrown under the prows of canoes to bless the wood and to be torn in shreds by it. Then, when they were not pregnant, men of the crew, their faces masked, would force their way into the slave compartments at night, lie with the women, and go away, for if it were known that a chief had had contact with a slave woman he would be punished; but all had such contact. And when the children of these unions were born, they would

be slaves; and if they grew to manhood, they would be hung about the altars of gods; and if they grew to womanhood, they would be ravished at night by men they never knew. And the cycle would go on through all eternity, for they were slaves.

In the early light of morning, the visible presence of the island with its smoking mountain spurred the famished men so that by nightfall it was certain that next morning the long voyage would end. Through the last soft tropical night, with the luminous mountain ahead, the crew of the *West-Wind* followed their rhythmic, steady beat.

As THEY approached the end of a voyage nearly five thousand miles long, it is appropriate to compare what they had accomplished with what voyagers in other parts of the world were doing. In the Mediterranean, descendants of once-proud Phoenicians, who even in their moments of glory had rarely ventured out of sight of land, now coasted along established shores and occasionally cut across the sea for perhaps two hundred miles. In Portugal, men were beginning to accumulate information about the ocean, but it would be six hundred years before even near-at-hand islands like the Azores would be found.

On the other side of the earth, Chinese junks had coasted Asia and in the southern oceans had moved from one visible island to the next. From Arabia and India, merchants had undertaken considerable voyages, but never very far from established coasts. Only in the north of Europe did the Vikings display enterprise even remotely comparable to that of the men of Bora Bora; but even they had not yet begun their long voyages, though they had at their disposal metals, large ships and woven sails.

It was left to the men of the Pacific, men like cautious Tamatoa and energetic Teroro, to meet an ocean on its own terms and to conquer it. Sailing with only the stars and a few lengths of sennit, some dried taro and positive faith in their gods, these men accomplished miracles. It would be nearly seven centuries before an Italian navigator, sailing under the flag of Spain, would dare, in three large and commodious ships well nailed together, to set forth upon a voyage not quite so far and only half as dangerous.

AT DAWN Teroro brought his canoe close to land at the south-eastern shore of a vast volcanic island. When the shore line became visible, he

reflected: "It's all rocks. Where are the coco-nuts? Where's the water?" But King Tamatoa mused: "It is the land Tane brought us to. It must be good."

Only Tupuna appreciated the problems which the next few hours would bring. "This land is filled with strange gods," he thought. "Will I be able to placate them all?" He called Pa to the gods' house and handed him a square, flat stone. "You will follow me," he said, "because you are extremely brave." He adjusted the king's feather cape, handed Teroro a spear, and lifted into his own hands Tane and Ta'aroa. "Now!" he cried, and the canoe touched land.

First to disembark was Tamatoa, and as soon as he had made one footprint in the sand he stopped, knelt down and, bringing a handful of earth to his lips, he kissed it many times. "This is the land," he chanted. "This is a man's home. This is good land to settle upon, a good land on which to have children. Here we shall bring our ancestors. Here we bring our gods."

Behind him, in the prow of the canoe, stood Tupuna, his face upraised. "Tane, we thank you for the safe voyage," he whispered. Then, in a penetrating voice, he called, "You unknown gods! You brave and gentle gods who hold this island! You fine and generous gods, you forty million gods! We will honour you. Allow us to land." He stepped ashore, expecting some awful omen, but none came and he told Pa, "You may bring the rock of Bora Bora on to its new home," and Pa leaped ashore with the only lasting memorial of home: a square of rock. "Now you, Teroro," Tupuna cried, "with your spear."

When Teroro left the canoe, he did not worry about new gods. He placed his hands on the prow of *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* and whispered, as gently as if speaking to Marama, "Beautiful ship, forgive me for cutting away your glory. You are the queen of the ocean." And he leaped ashore to guard his brother.

Tupuna left three warriors to guard the canoe while the others formed the solemn procession that would invade the island. Tupuna at the head of his column came to a large rock and begged the god of that rock to let him pass. When he came to a grove of trees he cried, "God of these trees, we come in friendship."

They had gone only a short distance when a passing cloud dropped misty rain upon them, and Tupuna shouted, "We are received! The

gods bless us. See where the rainbow ends? There will be our temple!" And he hurried to the spot, crying, "Any evil that is here, Tane, push it aside, for this is to be your temple!"

The foot of the rainbow had fallen on an inviting plateau overlooking the ocean, and Tamatoa said, "This is a good omen indeed." Then he and his white-bearded uncle began their search for a high male rock, for both knew that the earth itself was female and therefore polluted, but solid rocks were male and therefore uncontaminated. After a long search he found a large protrusion of male rock coming erect out of fine reddish soil, and Tupuna said, "A perfect site for an altar."

So Pa placed upon this rock his slab of Bora Bora stone, and with this symbolic action the new island was occupied, for upon the flat stone Tupuna reverently placed Tane and Ta'aroa. Then he filled a coco-nut cup with sea water, and sprinkled it over the temple area, over the gods, and over every human being who had come in the canoe, flicking it into their faces with the long finger of his right hand. "Now let us purify ourselves," he said, leading every living thing into the ocean: king, warrior, pig, chicken and breadfruit bundle. Afterwards a canny woman cried, "Do you know what I stood on? Hundreds of shellfish!" And they all fell back into the waves and began routing out sweet snails, popping them into their mouths and grinning.

Then Tupuna led everyone back to the plateau, and while the slaves began to tremble he and Tamatoa laid out the four corners of the temple and the farmers dug deep holes. But when the king signalled his warriors to bury the four slaves, Teroro, placing himself before them, pleaded: "Brother, Tane doesn't require that we launch our new island by more killing."

Tamatoa, astonished, explained: "But the temple must be upheld!"

"Brother! I beg you! Don't start this killing!"

"Your words are ill-timed," Tamatoa said stubbornly. This matter concerned his relationship to the gods; perhaps the entire fortune of the voyage depended on these next few minutes.

An idea came to Teroro and, spreading his arms, he pleaded, "If we must sacrifice to Tane, let us sacrifice the male pig."

The idea was appealing; all knew that Tane loved pig sacrifices more than any other. But Tupuna killed the suggestion. "We must keep the boar to breed more pigs," he said flatly, and all agreed.

Then Teroro cried, "Wait! Long ago when we had no pigs, we gave Tane ulua, the man-of-the-sea!"

Tupuna nodded. "The gods are pleased with man-of-the-sea."

"Give me half an hour," Teroro pleaded. He took six of his best fishermen on to the reef. They cast their lines and Teroro prayed, "Ta'aroa, god of the sea, send us ulua to save men's lives." They caught eight, two for each corner, and returned to the plateau, and Tamatoa looked at the big handsome fish and said, "For three of the corners we will use man-of-the-sea. But for the essential corner we will use a man."

In bitterness Teroro left the scene, for he would not be partner to what was about to occur. He sat on a distant rock and thought: "We flee an evil, but we bring it with us."

When the sacrifice was made and the consecration of the temple was completed, and when *mana* had again begun to flow into Tamatoa so that he could function as a king, Tupuna organized an expedition in search of food. It was not productive. They came upon a fern whose core was just barely edible, and to the fern Tupuna said, "Oh, god of this fern, we are hungry. Allow us to borrow your trunk, and we will leave the roots so that you will grow again." Then they came upon a tree taller than any they had known in Bora Bora, and Pa observed: "One tree like that would build a house," so Tupuna prayed, "Mighty tree, please let us borrow your strength. See, I plant at your roots a rich ulua for you to eat, and when you are finished, may we come and use your wood for a house?" If they did not find food, they did come upon something almost as good: a cave well up from the reach of the sea, and dry. At its entrance Tupuna buried his last ulua and prayed: "Gods of this cave, please take away any dark things you have left hiding here." Then he entered and called back: "This will be our home."

At this point there came a shout of laughter from the shore where the pigs had been turned loose; it was obvious that the old boar still had sea legs, for he would take a few steps, wait for the canoe to surge beneath him, adjust his legs to meet it, and fall snout-first into the sand. Looking dazed, he would grunt loudly and adjust his wobbly legs for the next roll, only to fall on his face again. To the watchers the infuriated hog brought the therapy of laughter, so that when Tupuna cried, "Move everything to the cave!" they responded willingly, and in labour ignored the danger threatening them, that in their new home there might be

no food. But when they got to the cave with their burdens, two farmers reported: "There are good birds on this island," and at once overhead flew a line of terns, which when baked tasted like delicious chicken and bonito, mixed. So Tamatoa said, "Tane would never have brought us here if there were no food. It may not be the food we have known, but it is here."

Now, with the temple established, the great canoe properly beached, and all treasures stowed in the cave, the men who had completed this long voyage began to look at their women, and one by one the emaciated but handsome girls were led into the bushes and cherished, and new life was launched on the island.

But of the women, the fairest could not find her man, for Teroro was brooding by the sea. Tehani left the cave and walked down to the shore, crying in vain, "Teroro!" until Mato, who so far had no woman of his own and who had sat close to Tehani all the way north, thus seeing her in many lights, heard her and ran through the wood until he could, as if by accident, encounter her. "Can't you find Teroro?" he asked. He took Tehani's hand, but she pulled away.

"No!" she said. "I am a chief's daughter and a chief's wife."

"Are you Teroro's wife? I sat very near you on the trip. It didn't look to me as if Teroro thought of you as his wife."

"I was taboo," she explained.

"But thinking of you wasn't taboo," Mato said. "Teroro never thought of you, Tehani. I did."

He took her hand again, and this time, because she knew that what he said was true, she allowed the rugged young chief to pull her into the dark glade away from the shore. Gathering her in his arms Mato whispered, "You are my woman, Tehani." But when she heard his words Tehani grew afraid, for she knew that she was not his woman, and she broke away, ran back to the beach and ran up to Teroro, crying nervously, "You must make peace with your brother."

And she led her husband back along the ocean front, while Mato stood bitterly watching her, and on to the plateau where Tamatoa surveyed the rude temple. Looking over his brother's shoulder, Teroro could see the ominous stones resting on fresh earth. He was dismayed but said grudgingly, "This is an appropriate temple, brother. Later we

will build a better." The king nodded, and it was then that Tehani of the long tresses and the flashing eyes led her husband into the darkness of the cave, knowing in her heart that it was another who should have accompanied her.

THE SEXUAL life of the king was much too important to be conducted in darkness and hidden glades, so on the next day, after the fishermen had brought in their first substantial catch and women had boiled their unpromising pandanus fruit, Tupuna announced that it was time for Tamatoa to lie with his wife, Natabu.

That afternoon, when a tent of saplings covered with the most consecrated tapas was completed according to ancient custom, Natabu was blessed by Tupuna and led into the nuptial area and placed upon the woven mats. The king was then blessed, and the entire company, including even the slaves, surrounded the tapa house and chanted. Then, with the prayers and blessings of all the community, the king was taken to the sanctified house by the priest, and hidden by the lowered tapa. At this point, in mounting frenzy, the crowd prayed: "May this union produce for us a king." They prayed with special fervour, for in a strange land an heir was essential to represent them before the gods if Tamatoa died. The woman with whom the king lay was his sister. It had been believed since ancient times in the islands that for a king to breed an heir who would combine the finest lineage and utmost sanctity he must mate only with his full-blood sister; although both Tamatoa and Natabu might also take other spouses, their principal obligation was the production of royal descendants.

In the late afternoon, when the king and Natabu left the tent, the chants continued, and all prayed that a good thing had been accomplished on this auspicious day.

When the tent was taken down, Tamatoa faced another obligation; he was led by Tupuna to a field round which the farmers had built mud walls. They had diverted a small stream into the field and already the bottom, which would become the taro bed, was a foot deep in soft mud. Standing at the edge, Tamatoa cried, "May the *mana* of my body pass through my feet and bless this field!" Then he stepped knee-deep into the muddy water and began trampling the bed. He was joined by Tupuna, Teroro, Mato and Pa, the men with most *mana*, and for hours



they passed back and forth over every inch of the taro patch, hammering the mud into a watertight basin, sealing it with their *mana*. Then Tamatoa shouted, "May this bed be for ever sealed!" And according to customs more than two thousand years old, the people planted not only the taro but the breadfruit, bananas and pandanus.

But for no crop were they as fearful of failure as when they planted the coco-nuts, for their entire manner of life was intertwined with this extraordinary tree. When the nuts were young they gave delicious water; when old, oil or sweet milk. Coco-nut palms thatched many of the houses; shells formed cups and utensils; fibres from the husks yielded sennit. Timber from the trunk was used for building and for carving gods; the wiry fibre that grew in the crown was woven into fabric; and the sharp ribs of the leaves were used in making darts. But most of all, the coco-nut gave food, from the time when it contained a just-formed, jelly-like substance eaten with scoops by the old or ill to the day when it was a firm sweet nut. Therefore, when a coco-nut was planted, the people placed about the nut a baby octopus to hold the resulting tree erect and prayed: "May the king have done a good job this day."

When the crops were planted, a question arose as to what the island should be named, and the warriors, who knew little of omens, agreed that it ought to be called Bora Bora; but when Tupuna heard the report he announched, "There is only one name for our island, Havaiki."

The settlers were outraged that their new-found refuge should have the hated name Havaiki, but the old priest, his white beard blowing in the breeze, began the most ancient and sacred chant of his people, summarizing their race-experience: "In ancient times the people of the swift canoes lived in Havaiki, but it was not the Havaiki we know. It was Havaiki-on-the-Great-Land, and from there King Tamatoa's ancestor back to forty generations led his people in a canoe, and they went to Havaiki-Where-the-Animal-Is-Like-a-Man, and there they lived for many generations, until King Tamatoa's ancestor back to thirty generations led his people in canoes to Havaiki-of-the-Green-Lagoon. . . ."

And in a wild soaring voice he recalled the search of his people, wandering from one land to another, always seeking an island where they would find peace. Always, wherever they landed, they called their new home Havaiki, and if the new Havaiki treated them badly they set forth in search of a better, as their ancestors had done. Thus he

recounted their migration from the interior of Asia to the north coast of New Guinea, through the Samoan islands and out to distant Tahiti. Later men, reconstructing the voyages, would discover more than a dozen Havaikis, but none closer to the ancient dream than the island now to be dedicated. "For us there is only one name," the old man insisted. "Havaiki of the brave canoes, Havaiki of strong gods, courageous men and beautiful women, Havaiki that has lived in our hearts for sixty generations. This is the island of Havaiki!"

King Tamatoa spoke solemnly: "Let old Havaiki be remembered as Havaiki-of-Red-Oro, but our land is Havaiki-of-the-North." So the island was named Havaiki, the last successor in a mighty chain.

It was only when Teroro, accompanied by Mato, Pa and three others, had sailed completely round Havaiki, requiring four days for the exploration, that the settlers appreciated what a magnificent island they had found. "There are two mountains, not one," Teroro explained, "and many cliffs and rivers, and endless birds. And some of the bays are as inviting as Bora Bora's lagoon."

But it was blunt Pa who summed up what they had learned: "It looked to us as if we had picked the worst land in Havaiki." Gloomily, Mato agreed; but King Tamatoa and his aunt and uncle looked at the newly planted crops and at the temple and said stubbornly, "This is where we have established our home." Still, Mato and Pa thought: "If anything should happen, we know where the good land is."

AND THEN the forgotten one appeared. It was on a hot, dusty afternoon when Teroro had gone into the forest seeking birds that he turned and found a strange woman confronting him. She was handsome in figure, dressed in a fabric he had not seen before, and her hair stood out like wild grass. She was of his race, yet she was not. With mournful and condemning eyes she stared at Teroro, but she did not speak. When in fright he started to run, she ran with him; and when he stopped she stopped; but always when he paused, she stared at him in reproach. Finally, she departed in silence, whereupon Teroro regained some of his bravery and ran after her, but she had disappeared.

That night Teroro could see the burning eyes of the woman staring at him in the darkness. The next morning he took Mato aside and said, "I have found some birds. Let's go into the wood."

The two young chiefs moved through the trees, and Mato asked, "Where are the birds?" And suddenly the woman stood before them. "Who is this?" Mato asked, astonished.

"She came to me yesterday. I think she wants to speak."

But she said nothing; when they moved she walked with them, her garments dishevelled, her strange hair glistening in the sun. Then she vanished. "Woman! Woman!" Teroro called, vainly.

The two young men went back to old Teura and said, "In the trees we met a strange woman with different hair. . . ."

Before they could finish, the old woman burst into a long wail. "*Auwe, auwe!* It is Pere! She has come to destroy us!"

Tupuna hurried in and she announced: "They have seen Pere of the burning fire!" And when the king arrived at the commotion she warned him: "The forgotten one has come to punish us."

"*Auwe!*" the king mourned, and he decided that the entire community must assemble at the temple to pray for forgiveness for the unforgivable error they had committed in abandoning the goddess who had wished to accompany them. But the prayer was not uttered, for at this moment the red earth of Havaiki began to shake violently, and cracks appeared through the heart of the settlement, and pigs squealed. "Oh, Pere!" the king cried in terror. "Spare us!" And his prayer must have had power, for the trembling stopped, and the horrified voyagers huddled together to decipher this mighty omen.

They did not succeed, for a much greater omen was about to envelop them. From the mountain high above their heads volumes of fire began to erupt, and rocks were thrown far into the air. Scattered ash fell back on to the earth and settled on the king's head and on the newly planted banana shoots. All day the fires continued, and into the night, so that the undersides of the clouds that hung over the island shone red, as if they were ablaze. It was a night of terror, paralysing in its strangeness. The settlers gathered at the shore near *West-Wind*, and when the eruptions grew worse Tupuna insisted that the king and Natuba, at least, be sent out to the safety of the sea. It was because of this foresight that the colony was saved, for when the canoe was a mile out to sea, lighted by the blazing mountain, a great ocean wave sped towards shore, and if the canoe had not already reached the sea the onrushing wave would have destroyed it.

As it was, the water swept far inland, and tore down the temple and uprooted many of the crops. In its swirling return to the sea, it dragged with it one of the sows, most of the bananas and old Teura. The goddess had warned her, so that when the turbulent sea reached far inland to grab her she was not afraid. Committing herself entirely to the gods, she whispered into the engulfing waves, "Great Ta'aroa, keeper of the sea, you have come for me and I am ready." As she was dragged across the reef, the green water rushing over her, she smiled, for she was certain that somewhere out beyond the coral she would encounter her personal god, Mano, the wild blue shark. "Mano!" she cried at last. "I am coming to talk with you!" And she was carried far from land.

WHEN DAWN rose, accompanied by new explosions of ash and flame, Tamatoa studied his stricken community. He could explain the ravages, especially the fallen temple, only by the fact that no slaves had been planted alive at three of the corners, but Teroro would not tolerate such reasoning. "We are punished because we forgot our most ancient goddess, and because we built in the wrong place," he insisted.

How wrong the place was would now be proved, for Mato came running with the news that a wall of fire was creeping down the mountain towards the settlement. A dozen men climbed towards where Mato had pointed and saw a fearful thing: above them, marching over all obstacles, came a relentless wall of fiery rock and molten lava, turning over and over upon itself, devouring trees and valleys. Its ugly snout, thirty feet high, seemed dead, until it struck a dried tree, whereupon flames leaped mysteriously into the air.

"It will be upon us by tomorrow," the men advised the king.

"We will first pray for Teura," Tamatoa said calmly, and blessed her to the gods. Then he commanded: "All plants will be dug up immediately and wrapped carefully, even if you must use your own clothes." He showed the slaves how to load the canoe, and when, less than three miles away, lava began pouring over a low cliff like a flaming waterfall, he studied it for a long time. Then he said, "We will stay ashore tonight and get all things ready. In the morning we will leave this place. Pa has found promising land to the west."

When dawn came the settlers were ready to go, with much of their seed, their gods, their pigs and their canoe. When they were safe at

sea, they saw the vast, fiery front of the lava break through on to their plateau, where it ate its way impersonally across all things. The temple site was burnt away in a flash; the fields were filled with fire; and the cave disappeared behind a wall of flame. From the plateau, the cascade of fire found a valley leading to the sea. When it struck the water it hissed and groaned, threw columns of steam in the air and filled the sky with ash; then, conquered by the ocean, it fell silently into dark caverns, as it had been doing here for thirty million years.

The men of Havaiki, seeing for the first time the incredible fury of which their new land was capable, sat awe-struck in their canoe and watched the cataclysm destroy their home. Then a gust of wind, stronger than the rest, carried down from the crest of the volcano a wisp of hair, spun by the breezes from the molten lava, and Teroro caught the hair and saw that it was the hair which the strange woman in the forest had worn. "It was the goddess Pere," he said. "She came not to frighten us but to warn us. We did not understand."

His words gave the people in the canoe great hope, for if the goddess had thought enough of her erring people to warn them all was not lost. The hair of Pere was given to the king as an omen, and he placed it upon the neck of the remaining sow, because if she did not live and deliver her litter it would be as bad an omen as the volcano.

In this manner, bearing only half the cargo with which they had arrived and a sow clothed in Pere's hair, the voyagers started for a new home. Pa had chosen wisely, for he led them round the southern tip of the island and up the western coast until they found fine land with water, and it was here that the settlement of Havaiki began in earnest, with new fields and a new temple built without sacrifices.

When the sow threw her litter, the king himself watched over the young pigs, and when the largest reached a size at which he could have been eaten—and mouths had begun to water for the taste of roast pig—the king and old Tupuna carried the pig reverently to the new temple and sacrificed it to Tane. From then on the community prospered.

WHEN THE settlement was established, Tupuna said to the king and Teroro, "Soon I shall follow Teura, but before I go we ought to protect the life of our people. Men should not live without restraint."

Teroro, listening, argued: "We had too many restraints in Havaiki-

of-Red-Oro. Here we ought to be free. I like our life the way it is."

"For a few months, perhaps," the priest said. "But as the years pass, unless a community has fixed laws, and patterns which bind people into their appointed place, life is no good."

The king supported him, so Tupuna promulgated the traditional taboos. He enumerated more than five dozen taboos which protected the king in his suspension between the upper gods and the lower men: his spittle may not be touched; his food must be prepared only by chiefs; his reservoir of *mana* must be protected.

Men with *mana* required protection from defilement by women, who usually had none. Since men were of the light and women of darkness, since men were outgoing and strong and women intaking and weak, dreadful taboos were set about the latter. They must never eat with men, nor see men eating, nor touch food intended for men, on pain of death. Each month they must spend the moon-days locked up in a tiny room. They must eat none of the good foods required to keep men strong: no pig, no sweet fish, no coco-nuts.

Laughing at improper moments was taboo; so were certain sex habits, the eating of certain fish and the ridicule of either gods or nobles. Taboo was the temple, taboo were the rock gods, taboo was the hair of Pere.

Thus, what had been a free volcanic island, explosive with force, now became an island with rigid patterns whereby each man would know his level and none would transgress. And men liked it better, for the unknown was made known.

Yet one man was not content. Teroro, as the king's younger brother, was the logical man to become priest when old Tupuna died. But he was far from the dedication required for this exacting job. Instead of the equanimity that marked the king, Teroro was torn with uncertainties, and they centred upon women. Day after day, when he wandered in the wood, he would come upon Pere, her shining hair dishevelled and her eyes deep-sunk. She said nothing, but walked with him as a woman walks with a man she loves. Often, after her appearance, the volcano would erupt, but the lava flows went down the other side of the mountain and did not endanger the growing settlement, where many pigs roamed, and chickens, and sweet, succulent dogs; for Tamatoa and Natabu had done their work well and had produced a son.

Yet Teroro's real agony concerned not the silent, shadowy Pere, but

a substantial woman, and this was Marama, his wife whom he had abandoned. Her placid face and sweet wisdom had been the continuing thread of his life, and for the first time, here on remote Havaiki, Teroro began to understand how desperately a man can remember a strong, placid, wise woman. He would see her at night when he returned from his silent walks with Pere. In his dreams he would hear her speak. And whenever he saw *Wait-for-the-West-Wind*, that perfect canoe, he would see Marama, for she had said, "I am the canoe!" And she was.

It was in this mood that one morning he dashed from his thatched hut where Tehani slept and ran to Mato, at the fishing grounds. Grabbing the surprised chief by the hand, he dragged him to the hut, and jerked Tehani to her feet. "She is your woman, Mato," he shouted.

"Teroro!" the young girl cried.

"You are no longer my woman!" Teroro shouted. "I watched you on the canoe. Mato never took his eyes from you. All right, Mato, now she is yours." And he stalked from the scene.

That afternoon he sought out his brother and said simply, "I shall go back to Bora Bora." The king was not surprised, for news of Teroro's rejection of Tehani had been discussed with old Tupuna, who had said that he was ill in spirit. "Why will you go?" Tamatoa asked.

"I must bring Marama here," the younger man said. "And we need more breadfruit, more dogs, everything. We need more people."

A council was held and all agreed that a trip south could prove helpful. "But who can be spared for such a long voyage?" Tupuna asked, and Teroro replied that he could sail *West-Wind* to Bora Bora with only six men, if Pa and Hiro were two of them. So the return trip was authorized. This time there was no dried taro, coco-nut or breadfruit, but dried fish there was in plenty, and on this the men would exist.

Teroro told his plan. Drawing a rough pattern of the trip north, he pointed out that the canoe had sailed far east, then north, then far west. With a bold line in the sand he cut across this pattern and said, "We will sail directly south, and we will find the island."

"There will be no storm winds to aid you," Tupuna warned.

"We will ride with the currents, and we will paddle."

On the last day before departure one of the village women came to Teroro and said plaintively, "On the return, if there is room in the canoe, will you please bring one thing for me?"

"What?" Teroro asked.

"A child. Any child," the woman replied softly. "It is woeful to be in a land where there are no children."

It was impractical to bring a child so far, Teroro said; but in a little while another woman came to him, saying, "Why should you bring pigs and breadfruit, Teroro? What our hearts ache for is children." And he sent her away. But the women came again and, while they did not weep, there were tears in their throats as they spoke: "We are growing older. There are babies, to be sure, but we need children."

"There are no children playing along the shore," another woman said. "Do you remember how they played in our lagoon?" And suddenly Teroro could see the lagoon at Bora Bora with hundreds of brown, naked children in the green waters, and he realized why Havaiki-of-the-North had seemed so barren.

"Please," the women pleaded, "bring us back some children."

On the night of departure Teroro told his brother: "I am not going solely for Marama. I am going to bring back the stone of Pere. I think an island should have not only men gods, but women, too."

ON THE long voyage south Teroro put together the rough chant that would be remembered in the islands for generations after his death and which served to guide subsequent canoes from Tahiti to the new Havaiki:

*Wait for the west wind, wait for the west wind!
Then sail to Nuku Hiva of the dark bays
To find the constant star.
Hold to it, hold to it,
Till wild Ta'aroa sends the winds.
Then speed to the clouds where Pere waits.
Watch for her flames, the flames of Pere,
Till great Tane brings the land,
Brings Havaiki-of-the-North,
Sleeping beneath the Little Eyes.*

Teroro missed the home islands altogether at first, reaching all the way down to Tahiti before he discovered where he was. Then, beating

his way back north, he found Havaiki-of-Red-Oro, and there at sea, in the gently rolling swells, the seven men held a council of war. Teroro posed the problem: "If we sail into Bora Bora without a plan, the High Priest, who must know about our attack on Oro, will command his men to kill us. Since we're not strong enough to fight, we must outsmart him." And he suggested a way.

As soon as *Wait-for-the-West-Wind* neared land and the residents of its home port began to line the shores and shout with joy Teroro warned his men: "I'll talk, but you must look pious." And promptly as the bow of the canoe struck land, he leaped ashore and cried, "We seek the High Priest!" and when that dignitary, older and more solemn, with flecks of white in his beard, approached, Teroro made deep obeisance and cried for all to hear, "We come as servants of Oro, seeking another god for our distant land. Bless us, august one, and send us another god."

The plea took the High Priest so by surprise that he was unable to mask his pleasure, and the staff with which he could have directed the sacrifice of the crew remained rooted in the ground. He listened as Teroro spoke rapidly: "Under Oro we have prospered, august one, and our community grows. But life is difficult and we live scattered. That is why your servant old Tupuna requires additional gods. When we have borrowed them from you, we will depart."

The High Priest listened, and then stood aside as the new king of Bora Bora appeared, and Teroro saw with intense pleasure that the man was from Bora Bora. "King," he cried, "forgive us for our assault on Havaiki before our departure. We did this not to dishonour great Oro but to prevent a Havaiki man from becoming king of Bora Bora." And Teroro was so weak, and so urgently in need of food and help, that he prostrated himself before the king, and then before the High Priest; and to his deep satisfaction he heard from the canoe the pious voice of Pa intoning: "Now let us go to the temple of Oro and give thanks for our safe voyage."

But as the men marched, Teroro caught sight of a woman at the edge of the crowd, a tall, solemn, patient woman with a face like a moon, and he thought no more of gods or kings or priests, for the woman was Marama, and she read in his eyes that he had come to take her with him; so while he prayed to a god whom he detested, she went to her grass house and prepared to leave.

When the prayers were over he joined her there, and they sat in silence, profound communion passing between them, and she was consoling in the disappointing moments when he was too exhausted with famine even to make love with her. She laughed softly and said, "See what happened on the last night we made love." And she brought him a boy nearly a year old, with wide eyes and dark hair like his father's. Teroro looked at his son, and at the wife he had left behind because she could bear no children, and in his embarrassment he began to laugh. Marama laughed too, and teased: "You looked so ridiculous out there praying to Oro. And Pa putting on that long face! 'Now let us go to the temple of Oro!' It was a good idea, Teroro, but it wasn't necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you noticed how much older the High Priest looks? He has been very badly treated."

"That's good news. How?"

"After all his scheming to banish you and Tamatoa, so that he could become the chief priest at Havaiki"

"You mean, they were just using him? To subdue Bora Bora?"

"Yes. They had no intention of making him chief priest. After you killed your wife's father"

"She's not my wife. I gave her to Mato."

Marama paused for a moment and looked at the floor. Quietly, she added, "The men of Havaiki tried to give us a new king, but we fought."

"Then why do you keep the High Priest?"

"Every island needs a priest," she said simply. And they fell silent, listening to the soft waves of the lagoon, and after a long while Teroro said, "You must find a dozen women who will go with us. It's a hard journey." Then he added, "And this time we'll take some children with us." His voice brightened. "We'll take our son."

"No," Marama said. "He's too young. We'll trade him for an older boy," and in the island tradition she went from house to house, until she found an eight-year-old boy she liked, and to his willing mother she gave her son. When Teroro saw the new boy, he liked him too, and after the child was sent away to wait for the canoe's departure, he took his wife in his arms and whispered, "You are the canoe of my life, Marama. In you I make my voyage."

AT THE consecration of the new idol of Oro, the High Priest insisted upon killing a slave, and Teroro hid his face in shame, for he and his men knew that, once the reef was breasted, the idol would be pitched into the sea. Teroro was reminded of the difficulty which still faced him: he had to get the red-rock statue of the goddess Pere from the temple without exciting the High Priest's suspicion that this had been the real reason for the return. Secretly, with Pa and Hiro, he canvassed the ways by which Pere might be kidnapped.

Pa suggested: "You fooled the priests with your talk of Oro. Fool them again."

"No," Teroro replied. "We were able to fool them about Oro because they wanted to believe. To mention a forgotten goddess like Pere would arouse their suspicions."

"Could we steal it?" Hiro proposed.

"Who knows where it is?" Teroro countered. They discussed other possibilities and agreed upon only one thing: to return to Havaiki-of-the-North without Pere would be insane, for since she had warned them once with such a disastrous wall of fire, the next time she would obliterate them altogether. It was then that Teroro proposed: "I shall talk with Marama. She is a very wise woman."

And it was Marama who devised the plan. "The island knows that you have come back for me," she pointed out, "and they recall that my ancestors were priests. When the women for our voyage have been gathered, two of us will go to the High Priest and tell him that we want to take one of the ancient Bora Bora gods with us. He is a priest of Oro, but he is also a Bora Boran. He will understand."

It worked exactly as she planned, but when the time came to deliver the red rock of Pere the High Priest could not bring himself to place such a treasure in the hands of a woman, and gave the goddess directly to Teroro; and when the latter at last had the soul of Pere in his possession, the wild, passionate soul of the fire goddess, the mother of volcanoes, he wanted to shout in triumph, but instead he laid it aside as if it were only a woman's god, a whim of his wife's, and the High Priest thought the same.

The men were fattened and food and seed crops were packed. Twelve women were selected and put on starvation diets to prepare them for the voyage. King Tamatoa's favourite wife was included, for everyone

agreed that, since their king had produced a royal heir of greatest sanctity, he should have at least one woman he loved.

When all was ready, Teroro was startled to see Marama dragging towards the canoe a large bundle wrapped in leaves. "What's that?" he cried.

"Flowers," his wife replied.

"Why must we take flowers?" Teroro protested.

"I asked Pa and he said there were no flowers." Teroro looked at the other members of the crew and they realized for the first time that Havaiki-of-the-North owned no natural blooms.

The task most joyous and exciting of all was the selection of the children. The ten selected ranged from four years old to twelve: dark-haired, deep-eyed, grinning, white-toothed children. Their very presence made the canoe lighter.

But when all had stepped aboard, Teroro was unaccountably depressed by the gravity of the task he had undertaken, and this time with no guile he went gravely to the High Priest and pleaded: "Bless our journey. Establish the taboos." And the High Priest arranged the gods and cried in a high voice, touching the food for the animals: "This is taboo! This is taboo!" And when he had finished the canoe somehow seemed safer, and it set forth for the long voyage north.

It had barely escaped from the lagoon when Pa, the shark-faced, went for the offensive statue of Oro, to throw it into the deep, but to his surprise Teroro restrained him and said, "It is a god! We will place it reverently on the shore of Havaiki-of-Red-Oro," and when he had led the canoe to that once-hated island, slipping ashore where no look-outs could intercept him, he placed Oro in a sheltered position among rocks, and built a palm-leaf canopy; and he was overcome with the awareness that never again would he see Havaiki, from which he had sprung. This was his land, his home, and he would know it no more.

THIS TIME when Teroro set the course back to Havaiki-of-the-North he ordered the cautious route to Nuku Hiva, where his crew replenished their stores, so that in the heart-breaking doldrums they had adequate food and water, especially for the children, who suffered intensely in the heat, for, try as they might, they could not make their stomachs into tight hard knots. They were hungry and they said so.

At last the stars of the Little Eyes were overhead, and the canoe turned joyously westward before the wind. Now Teroro conducted daily lessons for every man and boy aboard the canoe: "You know the island lies ahead. What signals will prove the fact?" And every male above the age of six became a navigator, and Marama, taking the place of old Teura, became the seer, collecting omens. One day a boy spotted a black fork-tailed bird attacking a gannet; and Teroro showed them how to read the wave echoes as they bounced back from unseen Havaiki; but the most solemn moment came when Marama, reading her clouds, saw fire upon them, and she knew that the goddess Pere had lighted a beacon for her voyagers, and it was to this cloud of fire that Teroro directed his canoe.

As the craft neared shore Teroro faced one last odious job, but he discharged it. Moving among the men and women he told each: "The children are no longer yours. They must be shared with those on shore, and each child shall have many mothers."

Immediately a wailing set up, for on the long voyage the men and women had grown attached to the children, and the wild young things had found mothers and fathers whom they liked. "If it had not been for the women on shore, pleading for children, I would not have thought to bring any," Teroro said firmly. "It is only just that they have their share."

So when the canoe landed, there was a moment of intense anguish as the women from shore, too long without the sound of children, hurried down and saw the boys standing awkwardly by a mast and the little girls holding on to men's hands. The women on shore could not see the new pigs or breadfruit or bananas. All they could see were the children.

It was in this manner that Teroro, bearing in his hands the rock of Pere, stepped ashore to become the compassionate and judicious priest of Havaiki, with his gentle wife, Marama, as seer, and with the volcano goddess as his special mentor. The pigs and the breadfruit and the children increased. Marama's flowers burst into brilliance. And the island prospered.

James A. Michener



HAWAII, for James A. Michener, is not just a literary interest, it is his home. He and his Japanese wife live in a house given to them by a group of Hawaiians—in the hope that he would write the story of their people. For this slender, professorial-looking author, who carries a bamboo cane and plays the bongo drums like a native, has done much through his writing, through his travels, and in his personal life to foster sympathetic understanding between the West and the peoples of the Orient.

Michener was born in New York in 1907, and grew up in Pennsylvania, which he left at the age of fourteen. For the next twenty years he travelled from one job to another, gaining degrees both in America and Scotland, and holding posts as varied as journalist, actor, editor, and university lecturer. When war broke out, he enlisted in the United States Navy and was sent to the Pacific. Here, at last, he found inspiration to fire his talent for writing.

Tales of the South Pacific, his first novel, gained him the Pulitzer Prize of 1947, and was adapted into a record-breaking musical show by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Two of his novels with an Oriental setting, *Return to Paradise* and *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*, have already appeared in Reader's Digest Condensed Books.

THE FINAL DIAGNOSIS



A condensation of the book by
ARTHUR HAILEY

"The Final Diagnosis" is published by Michael Joseph, London



Illustrations by Ken Riley

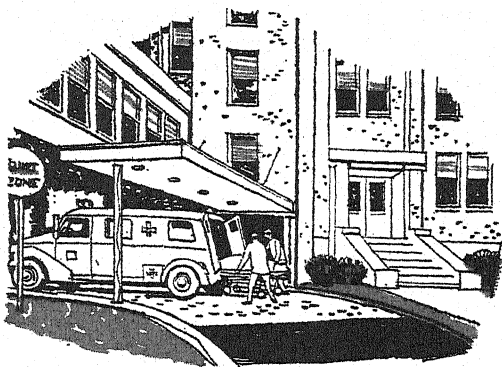
THE PATHOLOGIST is "the doctor the patient seldom sees." He is the man who works among the test-tubes in the hospital laboratories, studies X-rays, pores over slides of tissue, does the grim post-mortems, and is often called upon to make the final diagnosis which may save a life.

Dr. Joseph Pearson, fiery and ageing, was the autocratic chief of Pathology at Three Counties Hospital, and the despair of its brilliant new head of Surgery, Kent O'Donnell. For O'Donnell realized, as Pearson apparently did not, that, shiny though the surface still seemed at Three Counties, the hospital's standards had slipped badly, endangering its patients' lives.

How Three Counties met a frightening crisis forms the denouement of this highly readable and dramatic novel, which reveals the work of the pathologists who serve us all in their vital but little-known world.

"A first-class hospital drama."

—*Sunday Dispatch*



Chapter 1

AT MIDMORNING of a broiling July day the life of Three Counties Hospital ebbed and flowed like tide currents round an off-shore island. Outside the hospital the citizens of Burlington, Pennsylvania, perspired under a ninety-degree shade temperature with seventy-eight per cent humidity. Within the hospital it was cooler, but not much. Among patients and staff only the fortunate or influential escaped the worst of the heat in air-conditioned rooms.

There was no air conditioning in the Admitting department on the main floor, and Madge Reynolds, chief clerk in Admitting, reached into her desk for her fifteenth Kleenex that morning, and dabbed her face. It was time to locate four patients for admission that afternoon.

A few minutes earlier the day's discharge slips had come down from the wards, showing that twenty-six patients were being sent home instead of the twenty-four Miss Reynolds had expected. That, added to two deaths which had occurred during the night, meant that four new names could be plucked from the waiting list. Somewhere, in four homes in and around Burlington, a quartet of patients who had been

waiting for this call either hopefully or in fear could now pack a few essential belongings and put their trust in medicine as practised at Three Counties. Miss Reynolds opened a file folder, picked up the telephone on her desk, and began to dial.

A HUNDRED YARDS or so down the corridor Miss Mildred, senior records clerk at Three Counties, perspired profusely as she hurried after a quarry she had just seen disappear round the next corner.

"Dr. Pearson! Dr. Pearson!"

As she caught up with him the hospital's elderly staff pathologist paused. He moved the big cigar he was smoking over to the corner of his mouth. Then he said irritably, "What is it?"

Little Miss Mildred, five foot nothing in her highest heels, quailed before Dr. Pearson's scowl. But records, forms, files were her life. She summoned up courage. "These autopsy protocols have to be signed, Doctor. The Health Board has asked for extra copies."

"Some other time. I'm in a hurry." Joe Pearson was at his imperious worst.

Miss Mildred stood her ground. "Please, Doctor. It'll only take a moment. I've been trying to get you for three days."

Grudgingly Pearson gave in. He took the forms over to a desk, grumbling. "I don't know what I'm signing. What is it?"

"It's the Howden case, Dr. Pearson."

"There are so many cases. I don't remember," Pearson fretted.

Patently Miss Mildred reminded him. "It's the workman who was killed when he fell from a high catwalk. The employers said the fall must have been caused by a heart attack because otherwise their safety precautions would have prevented it." Pearson grunted, but Miss Mildred continued her summation. She liked to leave things tidy. "The autopsy, however, showed that the man had a healthy heart and no other physical condition which might have caused him to fall."

"I know all that." Pearson cut her short. "It was an accident. They'll have to give the widow a pension." He adjusted his cigar and scrawled a signature, half shredding the paper. Miss Mildred wondered how many days it was since the pathologist had brushed his grey, unruly hair. Under the white lab. coat she could see a knitted woollen waistcoat with holes which were probably acid burns. His grey, uncreased

trousers dropped over scuffed shoes. Joe Pearson's personal appearance was something between a joke and a scandal at Three Counties Hospital. Since his wife had died some ten years earlier his dress had become progressively worse. Now, at sixty-six, his appearance sometimes suggested a vagrant rather than the head of a major hospital department.

He signed the last paper and thrust the batch, almost savagely, at little Miss Mildred. "Maybe I can get on with some real work now, eh?" His cigar bobbed up and down, discharging ash partly on himself, partly on the polished linoleum floor. Pearson had been at Three Counties long enough to ignore the "No Smoking" signs in the hospital corridors. He nodded curtly, then ducked down the stairway which led to his own department in the basement.

ON THE SURGICAL floor, three stories above, the atmosphere was more relaxed. With temperature and humidity carefully controlled throughout the whole operating section, staff surgeons, housemen and nurses, stripped down to their underwear beneath theatre gowns, could work in comfort. Some of the surgeons had completed their first cases of the morning and were drifting into the staff-room for coffee. Between sips Lucy Grainger, an orthopaedic surgeon, was defending her purchase of a Volkswagen the day before.

"I'm sorry, Lucy," Dr. Gil Bartlett was saying. "I'm afraid I may have stepped on it in the parking lot."

"Never mind, Gil," she told him. "You need the exercise you get just walking round that Detroit monster of yours."

Bartlett, a general surgeon, was noted for his cream Cadillac, which in its gleaming spotlessness reflected the dapperness of its owner, one of the best dressed of the Three Counties surgeons. He was also the only member of the staff with a beard—a Van Dyke, always neatly trimmed.

Kent O'Donnell strolled over. He was chief of Surgery and also president of the hospital's medical board. Bartlett hailed him.

"Kent, I've been looking for you. I'm lecturing the nurses next week on adult tonsillectomies. Do you have some Kodachromes showing aspiration tracheitis and pneumonia?"

O'Donnell ran his mind over the colour photographs in his teaching

collection. What Bartlett was referring to was one of the lesser-known effects which sometimes follow removal of tonsils from an adult. Even with extreme operative care a tiny portion of tonsil may escape the surgeon's forceps and be drawn into the lung, where it forms an abscess. O'Donnell recalled a group of pictures portraying this condition; they had been taken during an autopsy. He told Bartlett, "I think so. I'll look for them tonight." He smiled at Lucy. They were old friends; in fact, he sometimes wondered if, given more time and opportunity, they might not become something more. He liked her for many things, not least the way she could hold her own in what was sometimes thought of as a man's world. At the same time, even in the shapeless theatre gown she was wearing now, she never lost her essential femininity.

A nurse entered discreetly. "Dr. O'Donnell," she said, "your patient's family are outside."

"Tell them I'll be out straight away." He moved into the locker-room and began to slip out of his theatre gown. With only one operation scheduled for the day he had finished with surgery now. When he had reassured the family outside—he had just operated successfully for removal of gallstones—his next call would be the administrator's office.

TWO FLOORS above Surgical, in private room forty-eight, George Andrew Dunton had lost the capacity to be affected by heat or coolness and was fifteen seconds away from death. As Dr. MacMahon held his patient's wrist, waiting for the pulse to stop, Nurse Penfield turned the window fan to "high" because the presence of the family had made the room uncomfortably stuffy. This was a good family, she reflected—wife, grown son and younger daughter. The wife was crying softly, the daughter silent but with tears coursing down her cheeks. The son had turned away but his shoulders were shaking.

Now Dr. MacMahon lowered the wrist and looked across at the others. No words were needed, and methodically Nurse Penfield noted the time of death as ten fifty-two a.m.

IN OBSTETRICS, on the fourth floor, Dr. Charles Dornberger scrubbed alongside two other obstetricians. Babies, he thought, had an annoying habit of coming in batches. There would be hours, even days,

when things would be orderly, quiet, and babies could be delivered in tidy succession. Then suddenly all hell would break loose, with half a dozen waiting to be born at once. This was one of those moments.

His patient, a buxom, perpetually cheerful coloured woman, was about to deliver her tenth child. While he was still scrubbing, Dornberger heard the houseman tell her to relax and the answer came back, "Relax, sonny? Ah am relaxed. Ah always relaxes when ah has a baby. That th' only time there's no dishes, no washin', no cookin'. Why, ah look forward to comin' in here." She paused as pain gripped her. Then, partly through clenched teeth, she muttered, "This'll be my tenth, and th' oldest one's as big as you, sonny. Now you be lookin' fo' me a year from now. Ah'll be back."

Dornberger heard her chuckling as her voice faded, the delivery-room nurses taking over. Scrubbed, gowned and sterile, he followed her into the delivery-room.

IN THE HOSPITAL kitchens, Hilda Straughan, the chief dietitian, nibbled a piece of raisin-pie and nodded approvingly at the senior pastry-cook. She suspected that the calories would be reflected on her bathroom scales, but quelled her conscience by telling herself it was a dietitian's duty to sample the hospital fare. Besides, it was somewhat late now for Mrs. Straughan to fret about her weight. The accumulated result of many earlier samplings caused her nowadays to turn the scales to about fourteen stone.

Mrs. Straughan glanced round her empire with satisfaction—the shining steel ovens and serving tables, the gleaming utensils, the sparkling white aprons of the cooks. She was in love with her job, and her heart warmed at the sight of it all.

This was a busy time in the kitchens. In twenty minutes the diet trays would go up to the wards, and for two hours afterwards the service of food would continue. Then, while the kitchen help cleared and stacked dishes, the cooks would begin preparing the evening meal.

The thought of dishes caused Mrs. Straughan to frown, and she moved into the back section where the two big automatic dishwashers were installed. This was an older and less gleaming part of her domain, and the chief dietitian reflected, not for the first time, that she would be happy when the equipment was modernized. It was understandable,

though, that everything could not be done at once, and she had to admit she had browbeaten the administration into a lot of expensive new equipment in her two years at Three Counties. All the same, she decided, she would have another talk with the administrator about those dishwashers soon.

TWO HUNDRED YARDS away from the main hospital block, in a run-down factory building that did duty as a nurses' home, student nurse Vivian Loburton was having trouble with a zip that refused to zip up.

Vivian, nineteen and fresh from Oregon, was in her fourth month of training and at one and the same time was awed and fascinated, repulsed and disgusted. She supposed that close contact with sickness and disease was always a shock for anyone new. But knowing that did not help much when your stomach was ready to do flipflops and it took all the will you possessed not to turn and run away.

"Hellfire!" she thought, using an expression much favoured by her lumberman father. The gap between morning classes and reporting to a ward for duty had been short enough. Now this zip . . . ! She tugged again, and suddenly the teeth meshed, the zip closed. Relieved, she ran for the door, then paused to mop her face. Jeepers, it was hot!

SO IT WENT—that morning as all mornings—through the hospital. In the clinics, nurseries, laboratories, operating-theatres; in Neurology, Psychiatry, Pediatrics, Dermatology; in Orthopaedics, Ophthalmology, Gynaecology, Urology; in public wards and the private patients' pavilion; in the service departments—Administration, Accounting, Purchasing, Housekeeping; in the waiting-rooms, corridors, lifts; throughout the six floors, basement and sub-basement of Three Counties the tides and currents of humanity and medicine ebbed and flowed.

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Kent O'Donnell made his way from the Surgical floor down to Administration. In his early forties, O'Donnell had retained the build which had made him an outstanding college half-back—tall, erect, with big, broad shoulders and muscular arms. He had never been an Adonis, but he had the rugged irregularity of face which women so often find attractive in men. Only his hair showed the real trace of years; not so long ago jet-black, it was greying swiftly.

From behind, O'Donnell heard his name called. He stopped and saw the caller was Bill Rufus, one of the senior surgical staff.

"How are you, Bill?" O'Donnell liked Rufus. He was conscientious, dependable, a good surgeon with a busy practice. Today he seemed troubled.

"Kent, I want to talk to you," Rufus said. "It's about surgical reports from Pathology. They're taking too long. Much too long."

O'Donnell was well aware of the problem. Like other surgeons, Rufus would frequently remove a tumour and have it examined by the hospital pathologist, Dr. Pearson. Pearson would make two studies of the tissue. First, working in a small laboratory adjoining the operating-theatre, and with the patient still under anaesthetic, he would freeze a small portion of tissue and examine it under a microscope. From this procedure could come one of two verdicts—"malignant," meaning that cancer was present, and that surgery would continue at once; or "benign," a reprieve which usually meant that the surgeon could make his closure and send the patient to the recovery-room.

"There's no delay in frozen sections, is there?" O'Donnell had not heard of any, but he wanted to be sure.

"No. It's the full tissue report that's taking so long."

"I see." O'Donnell's mind ran over procedures. After a frozen section a tumour went to the Pathology lab. where a technician prepared several slides, working more carefully and under better conditions. Later the pathologist would study the slides and give his final opinion. Sometimes a tumour which had seemed benign or doubtful at frozen section would prove malignant during this closer examination, and it was not considered abnormal for a pathologist to reverse his opinion. If this happened the patient would be returned to the operating-theatre for the necessary surgery. Obviously it was important for the pathologist's second report to be prompt.

"If it were just once," Rufus was saying, "I wouldn't object. I know Pathology's busy, and I'm not trying to get at Joe Pearson. But it isn't just once, Kent. It's all the time. I had a patient in here last week, Mrs. Mason—breast tumour. I removed the tumour, and at frozen section Joe Pearson said benign. Afterwards, on surgical report, he had it down as malignant." Rufus shrugged. "I won't quarrel with that; you can't call them all the first time. But Pearson took eight days to make the

surgical report. By the time I got it the patient had been discharged. It isn't easy to call a woman back and tell her you were wrong—that she does have cancer after all, and that you'll have to operate again."

No, it wasn't easy; O'Donnell knew that too well. Once, before he had come to Three Counties, he had had to do the same thing himself. He hoped he never would again. "Bill, will you let me handle this my way?" he said. He was glad it was Rufus. Some of the other surgeons might have made things more difficult.

"Sure. As long as something definite is done. This isn't just an isolated case, you know."

Again O'Donnell knew this was true. The trouble was, Rufus was not aware of some of the other problems which went with this. "I'll talk to Joe Pearson this afternoon," he promised. "After the surgical-mortality conference. Something will be done, I promise you."

Something, but what exactly? O'Donnell was still thinking about it as he turned into the Administration department and opened the door to Harry Tomaselli's office.

On the far side of the birch-panelled room Tomaselli was leaning over a table. Unrolled before him were plans and sketches, the architect's profile of Three Counties Hospital as it would appear with a magnificent new wing and a nurses' home, now in the advanced stages of planning. O'Donnell studied them. "Any more news?" he asked.

The administrator was polishing his glasses. "I talked with Orden again this morning." Orden Brown, president of the second-largest steel mill in Burlington, was chairman of the hospital's board of directors. "He's sure we can count on half a million dollars in the building fund by January. That means we'll be able to break ground in March. And he's convinced they can get the second half-million by next summer and wind up the campaign by autumn."

"That *is* good news," O'Donnell said.

"I thought you'd be pleased," Tomaselli said.

More than pleased, O'Donnell reflected. It was the first step towards fulfilment of a vision which had had its beginnings at the time of his arrival at Three Counties three and a half years ago. Funny how you could get used to a place, O'Donnell thought. If someone had told him at Harvard Medical School, or when he was chief surgical resident at Columbia Presbyterian, that he would wind up in a backwater hospital

like Three Counties, he would have scoffed. Even when he had gone to Bart's in London to enlarge his surgical experience, he had fully intended to come back and join the staff of one of the big-name hospitals like Johns Hopkins or Massachusetts General, and he could pretty well have taken his choice. But before there was time to decide Orden Brown had come to meet him in New York and persuaded him to visit Three Counties.

What he had seen there had appalled him. The hospital was run-down physically, its organization slack, its medical standards—with a few exceptions—low. The chiefs of Surgery and Medicine had held their posts for years; their objective in life was to preserve an amiable *status quo*. The administrator—key man in the relations between the lay board of directors and the medical staff—was a doddering incompetent. There was no budget for research. Orden Brown had not concealed from him that young, highly qualified graduates no longer sought to join the staff. Disgusted, O'Donnell never wanted to see Three Counties Hospital again.

Over dinner in the quiet, tapestried dining-room of his home, Orden Brown had told O'Donnell that the aged chairman of the hospital board had recently died. A group of influential citizens had persuaded Brown to succeed him. The choice had not been unanimous; a section of the old guard had wanted the chair for a nominee of their own—a long-time board member named Eustace Swayne. But Brown had been chosen by a majority, and now he was trying to persuade other board members to adopt some of his own ideas for the modernization of Three Counties.

It was proving an uphill fight. There was an alliance between a conservative element on the board, for whom Eustace Swayne was spokesman, and a group among the senior medical staff. Together they resisted change. Brown could have forced a showdown and used his influence to ease some of the elderly, inactive board members out of office. But this would have been shortsighted, because the hospital needed the legacies which would normally come to it when these wealthy patrons died. Eustace Swayne, who controlled a department-store empire, had already hinted that he and some others might change their wills, cutting the hospital off.

Some progress had been made, though, and one step which Brown

had undertaken with approval from a majority of the board was to negotiate for a new chief of Surgery.

O'Donnell had shaken his head. "I'm afraid it's not for me."

"Perhaps not," Brown had said. "But I'd like you to hear me out."

The older man's dedication was persuasive. "If you came here I couldn't promise you a thing," he had said. "I'd like to say you'd have a free hand, but the chances are you'd have to fight for everything you wanted. There would be areas in which I couldn't help you and in which you'd have to stand alone. The only good thing you could say about this situation is that it would be a challenge, in some ways the biggest challenge a man could take on."

They talked of other things then, and later his host had driven O'Donnell to the airport. "I've enjoyed our meeting," Orden Brown had said, and O'Donnell had returned the compliment, fully meaning it. Then he had boarded the plane, intending to write off Burlington, to think of it as a learning experience.

On the flight back he had tried to read a magazine but he kept thinking about Three Counties Hospital, about what he had seen there and what was needed. Then suddenly for the first time for many years he began to examine his own approach to medicine. What do I want? he had asked himself. What kind of achievement am I seeking? What have I got to give? At the end what will I leave behind? He had not married; probably he never would now. There had been love affairs—but nothing of permanence. Where is it leading, he wondered, this trail from Harvard, Presbyterian, Bart's . . . where? Then suddenly he had known the answer, known that it was Burlington and Three Counties, that the decision was firm and irrevocable. On landing at La Guardia he had sent a wire to Orden Brown. It read simply, "I accept."

Now, looking down at the plans of the new extension, O'Donnell thought back to the three and a half years which lay behind. Orden Brown had predicted the obstacles correctly. Gradually, though, the most formidable had been overcome.

After O'Donnell's arrival the former chief of Surgery had slipped quietly out. O'Donnell had rallied some of the surgeons already on the staff who were sympathetic to raising the hospital's standards. Between them they had tightened surgical rules and had formed a strong operating-theatre committee to enforce them. The less competent

surgeons were gently but firmly urged to limit themselves to work within their capabilities. A few of the incompetents, the assembly-line appendix removers, were given the choice of resigning quietly or being ousted. Some had proved difficult. There had been rows before the County Medical Committee, and two surgeons now had lawsuits pending against the hospital, which would mean bitter controversy and publicity.

But despite these problems O'Donnell had had his way and the gaps in staff were painstakingly filled with new, well-qualified men whom he had cajoled and persuaded to set up practice in Burlington.

In O'Donnell's three and a half years administration methods had been changed as well. A few months after his arrival O'Donnell had told Orden Brown about a young assistant administrator, one of the best he had known in his hospital experience. Two days later the chairman had him under contract. A month after that the old administrator, relieved to get out of a job which had grown beyond him, had been honourably pensioned and Harry Tomaselli installed in his place.

Tomaselli had entered the Navy from college and had been given a job in medical administration. As the Navy hospitals filled with wounded, Lieutenant Tomaselli had proved himself an able administrator and, after the war, he had enrolled at the School of Hospital Administration at Columbia University. He had graduated at a time when there was growing recognition of hospital administration as a specialized field in which a medical degree was neither necessary nor particularly useful. After two years as an assistant he had accepted the top post at Three Counties. Now the whole administrative side of the hospital reflected his brisk but smooth efficiency.

O'Donnell knew that in some ways they were only at the beginning of a long programme which would embrace the three basic tenets of medicine: service, training, research. He himself would be forty-three in a few months. He doubted if he could complete in full what he had set out to do. But the start was good; and he knew that his decision on the aeroplane three and a half years earlier had been right.

There were soft spots, of course, in the present set-up. Some of the seniors on the medical staff still fought off changes, and their influence was strong among the older members of the board, with Eustace Swayne, as obstinate as ever, at their head. Because of this group

there were occasions when planning had to be tempered with prudence.

It was just this which had made him thoughtful after talking with Bill Rufus. The Pathology department at Three Counties was still a stronghold of the old régime. Dr. Joseph Pearson, who ran it like a personal possession, had been there thirty-two years. He knew most of the old board members intimately and was a frequent chess companion of Eustace Swayne. More to the point, Joe Pearson was no incompetent; his record was good. In his earlier days he had been an active researcher, and he was a past president of the State Pathology Association. The real problem was that the work in Pathology had become too much for one man. O'Donnell suspected, too, that some of Pearson's laboratory procedures needed overhauling.

But desirable as changes there might be, it was going to be tough. If there was trouble with Joe Pearson, how would Pearson's influence with Eustace Swayne affect the hospital's drive for funds? Swayne's own donation would normally be a big one; loss of that alone could be serious. But equally serious was Swayne's influence with other people; in some ways the old tycoon possessed the power to make or mar their immediate plans. With so many things pending, O'Donnell had hoped the problem of Pathology could be left for a while. Nevertheless he had to take some action, and soon, about Bill Rufus's complaint.

He turned away from the plans. "Harry," he said to the administrator, "I think we may have to go to war with Joe Pearson."

Chapter 2

IN CONTRAST with the heat and activity of the floors above, the white-tiled corridor of the hospital basement was quiet and cool. Nor was the quietness disturbed by a small procession—Nurse Penfield, and alongside her a stretcher gliding silently on ball-bearing castors and propelled by a male orderly wearing rubber-soled shoes below his hospital whites.

A tradition, this last walk with a patient who had died, discreetly timed and routed through back corridors of the hospital, then down in the service lift, so that the living should take no darkness from death so close at hand. It was the last service from nurse to her charge, an acknowledgement that, though medicine had failed, it would not

dismiss the patient summarily: the motions of care, of service, would continue a token time beyond the end..

How short a time, Nurse Penfield thought, between life and the autopsy-room. Less than an hour ago the body under the shroud had been George Andrew Dunton, living, age fifty-three, civil engineer.

His family had behaved as well after the death as they had before—solid, emotional, but no hysterics. It had made it easier for Dr. MacMahon to ask for permission to carry out an autopsy. "Mrs. Dunton," he had said quietly, "I know it's hard for you to talk and think about this now, but there is something I have to ask. It's about permission for an autopsy on your husband."

He had gone on, using the routine words: how the hospital sought to safeguard its medical standards for the good of everyone; how a diagnosis could be checked and medical learning advanced; how this was a precaution for others who would use the hospital in time to come. But none of this could be done without permission. . . .

The son had stopped him and said gently, "We understand. If you make out whatever is necessary, my mother will sign it."

So Nurse Penfield had made out the autopsy form, and here now was George Andrew Dunton, dead, age fifty-three, and ready for the pathologist's knife.

The autopsy-room door swung open, and George Rinne, the Pathology department's Negro *diener*—keeper of the mortuary—looked up as the stretcher rolled in. He indicated the white enamelled table. "Over here," he said. The orderly manoeuvred the stretcher alongside, and the two men slid the body on to the table.

On the far side of the room was the pathology resident, Dr. McNeil. He had been shrugging into a white coat when Nurse Penfield came in. Now he glanced through the papers she handed him. "Well, everything seems to be here," he said.

Elaine Penfield turned and followed the attendant out. Her journey was done; tradition honoured, the extra, unasked service given.

While George Rinne slipped a wooden head-rest under the neck of the body, arranging the arms at the side, McNeil began to lay out the instruments they would need for the autopsy. "Better phone the nursing office, George," he said. "Tell them the student nurses can come down now. And let Dr. Pearson know we're setting up."

"Yes, Doctor." Rinne went out obediently. McNeil, as pathology resident, had authority even though his hospital pay was little more than Rinne's own. It would not be long, though, before the gap between them would widen. With three and a half years of residency behind him only another six months separated McNeil from freedom to take a post as staff pathologist. Then he could start considering some of the twenty-thousand-dollar-a-year jobs, because, fortunately, the demand for pathologists continued to be greater than the supply.

The door swung open again and Mike Seddons breezed in. Seddons was a surgical resident, temporarily assigned to Pathology, and he always breezed. His red hair stood up in odd places as though a self-created wind would never leave it static, and his boyish, open face seemed creased permanently in an amiable grin. He looked at the body on the table. "Ah, more business!" he said. "You doing this one?"

Roger McNeil shook his head. "Pearson's coming."

Seddons looked at him quizzically. "The boss man himself? What's special about this case?"

"Nothing special." McNeil snapped a four-page autopsy form on to a clip board. "Some of the student nurses are coming in to watch. I think he likes to impress them."

"A command performance!" Seddons grinned. "This I must see."

"In that case you may as well work." McNeil passed over the clip board. "Fill in some of this stuff, will you?"

"Sure." Seddons took the clip board and began to check the body. "Nice clean appendix scar . . . small mole, left arm . . ."

The door opened again, and six student nurses filed in with an instructor, glancing nervously at the body on the table.

Mike Seddons ran his eye appraisingly over the group. There were a couple of new ones here, including the brunette. He took a second look. Yes indeed; even camouflaged by the Spartan student's uniform, it was obvious that here was something special. With apparent casualness he crossed the room. Positioning himself between the girl and the rest of the group, he gave her a broad smile and said quietly, "I don't remember seeing you before. I'm Mike Seddons."

She said, "I'm Vivian Loburton. I've been around as long as the other girls." She laughed; then, catching a disapproving glance from the instructor, stopped abruptly. Vivian liked the look of this red-headed

young doctor, but it did seem wrong to be talking and joking in here. She wondered how she was going to react to the autopsy; death was still new to her and rather frightening.

There were footsteps coming down the corridor. Seddons touched her arm and whispered, "We'll talk again—soon." Then the door was flung open and Dr. Joseph Pearson strode in. He greeted the student nurses with a crisp "Good morning." Then he went to a locker, slipped off his white coat and thrust his arms into a gown, gesturing to Seddons, who stepped over and tied the gown strings at the back. Then, like a well-drilled team, the two moved over to a wash-basin where Seddons shook powder from a tin over Pearson's hands, afterwards holding out a pair of rubber gloves into which the older man thrust his fingers. Pearson shifted his cigar slightly and grunted a "Thanks."

He crossed to the table and, taking the clip board which McNeil held out to him, began to read it, apparently oblivious of everything else. Then he put the clip board down and, removing his cigar, faced the nurses across the table. "This is your first experience of an autopsy, I believe, so I will explain that I am Dr. Pearson, the pathologist of this hospital. These gentlemen are Dr. McNeil, the resident in pathology, and Dr. Seddons, a resident in surgery, in his third year, who is favouring us with a spell of duty in Pathology." He glanced at Seddons. "Dr. Seddons will shortly qualify to practise surgery and be released upon an unsuspecting public."

Two of the girls giggled; the others smiled. Seddons grinned; he enjoyed this. Pearson never missed an opportunity to take a dig at surgeons, probably with good reason—in forty years of pathology the old man must have uncovered a lot of surgical blunders.

"The pathologist," Pearson went on, "is often known as the doctor the patient seldom sees. Yet few hospital departments have more effect on a patient's welfare. It is Pathology which tests a patient's blood, checks his excrements, tracks down his diseases, decides whether his tumour is malignant or benign. It is Pathology which advises the patient's doctor on disease and sometimes, when all else in medicine fails"—Pearson paused, looked down significantly at the body of George Andrew Dunton, and the eyes of the nurses followed him—"it is the pathologist who makes the final diagnosis."

Pearson paused again. What a superb actor the old man is, Seddons



thought. What an unabashed, natural ham! Now Pearson pointed with his cigar. "I draw your attention," he said to the nurses, "to some words you will find on the wall of many autopsy-rooms." Their eyes followed his finger to the framed maxim—*Mortui Vivos Docent*. Pearson translated: "The dead teach the living." He looked down again at the body. "That is what will happen now. This man *apparently* died of coronary thrombosis. By autopsy we shall discover if that is true."

At this Pearson took a deep draw on his cigar, and handed it to Seddons, who put it down away from the table. Now Pearson surveyed the instruments laid out before him and selected a knife.

McNeil was looking at the student nurses. An autopsy, he reflected, would never be recommended viewing for the faint-hearted, but even to the experienced the first incision is sometimes hard to take. Using the skill, ease and speed of long experience, Pearson began the autopsy with a deep Y incision, the top branches of the Y from each shoulder meeting near the bottom of the chest, the lower stroke opening the belly all the way.

Still watching the student nurses, McNeil saw that two were deathly white, a third had gasped and turned away; the other three were stoically looking on. The resident kept his eye on the two pale ones; it was not unusual for a nurse to keel over at her first autopsy. But their colour was better now, and the other girl had turned back, though with a handkerchief to her mouth. McNeil told them quietly: "If any of you want to go out for a few minutes, that's all right. The first time's always hard." They looked at him gratefully, though no one moved.

Now McNeil slipped on his own gloves and went to work with Pearson, tying off and cutting the arteries. When the resident moved to apply himself to the cranium, Pearson began carefully to remove the heart and lungs. After scrutinizing the heart, he turned to the student nurses. "The medical history of this man shows that three years ago he suffered a first coronary attack and then a second attack earlier this week. So first we'll examine the coronary arteries." He delicately opened the heart-muscle arteries. "Somewhere here we should discover the area of thrombosis . . . yes, there it is." He pointed with the tip of a metal probe. In the main branch of the left coronary artery, an inch beyond its origin, he had exposed a pale, half-inch clot. He held it out for the girls to see.

"Now we'll examine the heart itself." Pearson laid the organ on a dissecting board and sliced down the centre with a knife. He turned the two sections side by side, peered at them, then beckoned the nurses closer. Hesitantly they moved in.

"Do you notice this area of scarring in the muscle?" Pearson indicated some streaks of white fibrous tissue in the heart, and the nurses craned to see more clearly. "There's the evidence of the coronary attack three years ago—an old infarct which has healed." He paused, then went on. "We have the signs of the latest attack here in the left ventricle. Notice the central area of pallor surrounded by a zone of haemorrhage." He pointed to a small dark red stain with a light centre, contrasting with the red-brown texture of the rest.

Pearson turned to the surgical resident. "Would you agree with me, Dr. Seddons, that the diagnosis of death by coronary thrombosis seems fairly well established?"

"Yes, I would." No doubt about it, Seddons thought. A tiny blood clot, not much thicker than a piece of spaghetti; that was all it took to cut you off for good.

Vivian was steadier now. She believed she had herself in hand, though near the beginning she had felt close to fainting. Mike Seddons caught her eye and smiled slightly. She wondered if he was amused or sympathetic.

One of the other girls was putting a question, uneasily. "The body—is it buried . . . just by itself?"

This was an old one. "It varies," Pearson answered. "Teaching centres such as this do more study after autopsies than non-teaching hospitals. In this hospital, usually just the shell of the body goes on to the undertakers. But before we can do any autopsy we must have permission from the family. Sometimes that permission is unrestricted, as in this case, and then we can examine the entire head and torso. At other times we may get only limited permission. In some cases, for reasons of religious faith, the organs are required for burial with the body. Then, of course, we comply with the request." Pearson turned his attention back to the body. "We'll go on now to examine . . ." He stopped and peered down, reached for a knife and probed gingerly. Then he let out a grunt of interest. "McNeil, Seddons, take a look at this."

Pearson moved aside, and the pathology resident leaned over. The

pleura, normally a transparent, glistening membrane covering the lungs, had a thick coating of scarring—a dense, white fibrous tissue. It was a signal of tuberculosis; whether old or recent they would know in a moment. McNeil moved aside for Seddons.

"Palpate the lungs, Seddons." It was Pearson. "I imagine you'll find some evidence there."

Seddons probed the lungs with his fingers. The cavities beneath the surface were detectable at once. He looked up and nodded.

"Was there a chest X-ray on admission?" Pearson asked.

McNeil shook his head. "The patient was in shock. There's a note in the case history that it wasn't done."

"We'll take a vertical slice to see what's visible." Pearson removed the lungs and cut smoothly down the centre of one. It was there unmistakably—fibrocaseous tuberculosis, well advanced. The lung had a honeycombed appearance—a festering, evil growth that only the heart had beaten to the kill. "Can you see it?" he asked.

"Yes," Seddons said. "Looks like it was a toss-up whether this or the heart would get him first."

Pearson looked at the nurses. "This man had advanced tuberculosis. It would have killed him very soon, yet presumably neither he nor his doctor was aware of its presence."

Pearson peeled off his gloves and began to remove his gown, addressing himself to the nurses. "There will be times in your careers," he said, "when you will have patients die. It will be necessary then to obtain permission for an autopsy from the next of kin. Sometimes this will fall to the patient's doctor, sometimes to you. When that happens you will occasionally meet resistance. It is hard for any person to sanction—even after death—the mutilation of someone they have loved. This is understandable."

Pearson paused to light a cigar. "When you need to muster arguments," he went on, "to convince some individual of the need for autopsy, I hope you will remember what you have seen today and use it as an example." He waved his cigar at the table. "This man has been tuberculous for many months. He may have infected others about him—his family, people he worked with, even some in this hospital. If there had been no autopsy, some of these people might have developed tuberculosis and it could have remained undetected until too late. Because of

what we have learned today, those who have been close to this man will be kept under observation and given periodic checks for several years to come."

To his own surprise, Mike Seddons found himself stirred by Pearson's words. He believes in what he is saying, he thought. He discovered that at this moment he was liking the old man.

As if he had read Seddons's mind, Pearson looked over to the surgical resident with a mocking smile. "Pathology has its victories, too, Dr. Seddons." He nodded at the nurses and was gone, leaving a cloud of cigar smoke behind.

THE MONTHLY surgical-mortality conference was scheduled for two thirty p.m. At three minutes to the half-hour Dr. Lucy Grainger hurried into the big, carpeted conference-room with its long walnut table and carved chairs and found herself close to Kent O'Donnell. About them was a babel of talk and the air was thick with tobacco smoke. Already most of the hospital's forty-odd staff surgeons had arrived, as well as house staff—housemen and residents.

O'Donnell smiled. "How have you been, Lucy? I haven't seen you, except in line of duty, for quite a while."

She appeared to consider. "Well, my pulse has been normal; temperature about ninety-eight point eight. Haven't checked blood pressure recently."

"Why not let me do it? Over dinner, perhaps."

"I'd love to, Kent, but I'll have to look at my book first."

"Do that and I'll phone you. Let's try to make it next week." O'Donnell touched her lightly on the shoulder as he turned away. "I'd better get this show opened."

Watching him ease his way through other groups towards the centre table, Lucy thought, not for the first time, how much she admired Kent O'Donnell, both as a colleague and as a man. The invitation to dinner was not a new thing. They had had evenings together before, and she had wondered if perhaps they might be drifting into some kind of tacit relationship. Both were unmarried, and Lucy, at thirty-five, was seven years younger than the chief of Surgery. But there had been no hint in O'Donnell's manner that he regarded her as anything more than a pleasant companion.

"Shall we get started, gentlemen?" O'Donnell had reached the head of the table and raised his voice across the heads of the others. He had savoured the brief moment with Lucy; the truth was that he found himself being drawn more and more towards her. But he was not at all sure this was a good thing for either of them. By now he had become fairly set in his own mode of life, and he suspected that the same thing might apply to Lucy: living alone and being independent grew on you after a while. There might be problems as well about their parallel careers. None the less, he still felt more comfortable with her than with any other woman he had known for a long time. She had a warmth of spirit, a strong kindness, that was at once soothing and restoring, and a mature beauty as well. Well, he would see how dinner went next week.

The hubbub had not died and, this time more loudly, he repeated his injunction that they start.

They moved to the long table with O'Donnell at the head, Pearson and his papers on the left. While the others were settling down, Lucy saw Pearson take a bite from a sandwich which he removed from a paper napkin among his pile of papers. She smiled; only Joe Pearson could get away with eating lunch at a mortality conference. Lower down the table she noticed Charlie Dornberger, one of Three Counties' obstetricians. He was going through the careful process of filling his pipe. Whenever Lucy saw Dr. Dornberger he seemed to be either filling, cleaning or lighting a pipe; he seldom seemed to smoke it. Next to him was Gil Bartlett, impeccably dressed as ever, and opposite Bartlett sat "Ding Dong" Bell from Radiology.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen." As O'Donnell looked down the table all conversation died. He glanced at his notes. "First case. Samuel Lobitz, white male, age fifty-three. Dr. Bartlett."

Gil Bartlett opened a ring notebook. He began quietly, "The patient was referred to me on June 12"

Lucy envied those who could be at ease in this meeting. It was an ordeal for anyone to describe his diagnosis and treatment of a patient who had died, then have others give their opinions, and finally the pathologist report his findings from the autopsy. There were honest mistakes that anybody in medicine could make—even, sometimes, mistakes which cost patients their lives. Few doctors could escape errors like this in the course of their careers. The important thing was to learn

from them and not to make the same mistake twice. That was why mortality conferences were held—so that everyone who attended could learn at the same time. Occasionally the mistakes were not excusable, and there was an uncomfortable silence, an avoiding of eyes. O'Donnell always talked privately with the offender, and Lucy had heard he could be extremely rough.

Gil Bartlett was continuing: “. . . The case was referred to me by Dr. Cymbalist, who told me he suspected a perforated ulcer. The symptoms he described tallied with this diagnosis. By then the patient was on the way to the hospital by ambulance.” Bartlett looked over his notes. “I saw the patient approximately half an hour later. He had severe upper-abdominal pain and was in shock. Blood pressure was seventy over forty. He was ashen grey and in a cold sweat. I ordered a transfusion to combat shock, and also morphine. Physically the abdomen was rigid, and there was rebound tenderness.”

Bill Rufus asked, “Did you have a chest film made?”

“No. The patient was too ill to go to X-ray. I agreed with the diagnosis of a perforated ulcer and decided to operate immediately.”

“No doubts at all, eh, Doctor?” The interjection was Pearson's.

For a moment Bartlett hesitated and Lucy thought: Something is wrong; the diagnosis was in error and Joe Pearson is waiting to spring the trap. Then she remembered that whatever Pearson knew Bartlett knew also by this time, so it would be no surprise to him. In any case Bartlett had probably attended the autopsy. Most conscientious surgeons did when a patient died. But after the momentary pause the younger man went on urbanely: “One always has doubts in these emergency cases, Dr. Pearson. But I decided all the symptoms justified immediate exploratory surgery. However, there was no perforated ulcer present, and the patient was returned to the ward. I called Dr. Toynbee for consultation, but before he could arrive the patient died.”

Gil Bartlett closed his ring binder and surveyed the table. So the diagnosis *had* been wrong, and despite Bartlett's outwardly calm appearance Lucy knew that inside he was probably suffering the torments of self-criticism. On the basis of the symptoms, though, it could certainly be argued that he was justified in operating.

Now O'Donnell was calling on Joe Pearson. He inquired politely, “Would you give us the autopsy findings, please?”

Pearson's gaze shot round the table. "As Dr. Bartlett told you, there was no perforated ulcer. In fact, the abdomen was entirely normal." He paused, as if for dramatic effect, then went on. "What was present, in the chest, was early development of pneumonia. No doubt there was severe pleuritic pain coming from that."

So that was it, Lucy thought. It was true—externally the two sets of symptoms would be identical.

"Is there any discussion?" O'Donnell said.

There was an uneasy pause. A mistake had been made, and yet it was not a wanton mistake. Most of those in the room were uncomfortably aware that the same thing might have happened to themselves. It was Bill Rufus who spoke out. "With the symptoms described, I would say exploratory surgery was justified."

Pearson was waiting for this. He started ruminatively, "Well, I don't know." Then almost casually, like tossing a grenade without warning: "We're all aware that Dr. Bartlett rarely sees beyond the abdomen." Then in the stunned silence he asked Bartlett directly, "Did you examine the chest at all?"

The remark and the question were outrageous. It was not as if Bartlett had a reputation for carelessness: he was known to be thorough and, if anything, inclined to be ultra-cautious.

Bartlett was on his feet, his chair flung back, his face flaming red. "Of course I examined the chest! I've already said the patient was in no condition to have a chest film, and even if he had——"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" It was O'Donnell, but Bartlett refused to be stopped.

"It's very easy to have hindsight, as Dr. Pearson loses no chance to remind us."

From across the table Charlie Dornberger motioned with his pipe. "I don't think Dr. Pearson intended——"

Angrily, Bartlett cut him off. "Of course you don't think so. You're a friend of his. And he doesn't have a vendetta with obstetricians."

"Really! I will not permit this." O'Donnell was standing himself now, banging with his gavel. "Dr. Bartlett, will you be kind enough to sit down?" It was costing O'Donnell a lot of effort not to sound off at Joe Pearson here and now. But if he did, it would make the situation worse.

O'Donnell had not shared Rufus's opinion that Gil Bartlett was

blameless in his patient's death. The key factor in the case was the absence of a chest X-ray. If Bartlett had ordered an upright chest film at the time of admission, he could have looked for indication of gas across the top of the liver and under the diaphragm. This was a clear signpost to any perforated ulcer; the absence of it would certainly have set Bartlett thinking. Also, the X-ray might have shown some clouding at the base of the lung, which would have indicated pneumonia. Either of these factors might have changed Bartlett's diagnosis and improved the patient's chances of survival. Of course, Bartlett had claimed the patient was too ill for an X-ray. But if the man had been as ill as that, should Bartlett have undertaken surgery anyway? O'Donnell's opinion was that he should not.

O'Donnell knew that, when an ulcer perforated, surgery should normally be begun within twenty-four hours. After that time the death rate was higher with surgery than without. This was because the first twenty-four hours were the hardest; if a patient survived that long, the body's own defences would be at work sealing up the perforations. From the symptoms it seemed likely that Bartlett's patient was close to the twenty-four-hour limit or perhaps past it. In that case O'Donnell himself would have worked to improve the man's condition without surgery, with the intention of making a more definitive diagnosis later. On the other hand, O'Donnell was aware that in medicine it was easy to have hindsight, but it was quite another matter to do an emergency on-the-spot diagnosis with a patient's life at stake.

In the normal course of events the chief of Surgery would have brought all this out, quietly and objectively, at the mortality conference, and a practical lesson in differential diagnosis would have been impressed on all the surgical staff. But now none of this could happen. If, at this stage, O'Donnell raised the points he had in mind, he would appear to be supporting Pearson and further condemning Bartlett. For the sake of Bartlett's own morale this must not happen. He would talk to Bartlett in private, of course, but the chance of a useful, open discussion was lost. Confound Joe Pearson!

"Gentlemen," O'Donnell said, "I think I need hardly say this is not an incident any of us would wish to see repeated. A mortality conference is for learning, not for personalities or heated argument. Dr. Pearson, Dr. Bartlett, I trust I make myself clear." O'Donnell glanced

at both, then, without waiting for acknowledgment, announced, "We'll take the next case, please."

There were four more cases down for discussion, but none of these was out of the ordinary and the talk went ahead quietly.

Lucy, glancing down the table at Bartlett, whose face was still set, wondered how much of Joe Pearson's censure at times like this was founded on personal feelings. Was it because Gil Bartlett represented something in medicine which Pearson envied and had never attained? Gil's practice was successful, and the Bartletts were prominent in Burlington society. Was this what griped Joe Pearson?—Joe Pearson who could never compete with the glamour of surgery, whose work was essential but undramatic, who had chosen a branch of medicine seldom in the public eye. Lucy had heard people ask: What does a pathologist do? No one ever said: What does a surgeon do? She knew there were some who thought of pathologists as a breed of hospital technician, failing to realize that a pathologist had first to qualify as a physician and then spend years of extra training to become a highly qualified specialist.

Money sometimes was a sore point too. Gil Bartlett, like all the other attending surgeons on the staff, received no payment from the hospital, only from his patients. But Joe Pearson was a hospital employee on a salary of twenty-five thousand dollars a year, roughly half what a successful surgeon many years his junior could earn. Lucy had once read a cynical summation of the difference between surgeons and pathologists: "A surgeon gets five hundred dollars for taking out a tumour. A pathologist gets five dollars for examining it, making a diagnosis, recommending further treatment, and predicting the patient's future."

Lucy's mind had wandered. O'Donnell was winding up the discussion of the last case. The others were rising from their seats. Joe Pearson had collected his papers and was shambling out. But on the way O'Donnell stopped him; he opened the door to a small office which adjoined the board-room. "Let's go in here a minute, Joe," he said. Pearson followed him. O'Donnell was elaborately casual. "Joe, I think you should stop riding people at these meetings. It gets us nowhere."

"I pointed out a wrong diagnosis—that's all. Do you suggest we keep quiet about such things?"

"You know better than to ask that." O'Donnell allowed his voice to take on an edge. He saw Pearson hesitate and suspected the old man knew he had gone too far.

Grumblingly he conceded, "I didn't mean that; not that way."

Despite himself Kent O'Donnell smiled. Apologizing did not come easily to Joe Pearson. "Joe," he went on, "if you don't mind, at these meetings I'd like you to give us the autopsy findings, then I'll lead the discussion. I think we can do it without getting tempers frayed."

Pearson shrugged. "If that's the way you want it."

"Thanks, Joe." It had been easier than O'Donnell had expected. Maybe this would be a good time to raise the other thing. "Joe," he said, "there's something else. It's about surgical reports."

"What about them?" The reaction was aggressively defensive.

"I've had complaints," O'Donnell went on. "Some of the reports have been a long time coming through Pathology."

"Rufus, I suppose." Pearson was openly bitter. You could almost hear him saying: Another surgeon causing trouble.

O'Donnell determined not to be provoked. He said quietly, "Bill Rufus was one. But there have been others. You know that, Joe."

For a moment Pearson made no answer, and O'Donnell reflected that in a way he felt sorry for the old man. Some people reconciled themselves to younger men moving into prominence and taking over leadership. Pearson had not, and he made his resentment plain. Did he feel himself slipping, unable to keep up with new developments in medicine? If so, he would not be the first.

"Look, Kent." Pearson was more conciliatory now. "Just lately I've been up to my ears. You've no idea how much work there is."

"I do have an idea, Joe." This was the opening O'Donnell had hoped for. "Some of us think you've too much to do. It isn't fair to you." He was tempted to add "at your age" but thought better of it. Instead he added, "How about getting some help?"

The reaction was immediate, Pearson almost shouting, "You're telling *me* to get more help! Why, man alive, I've been asking for months for more lab. technicians! We need three at least, so what am I told I can have? One! And typists! I've got reports that have been piling up for weeks, and who's going to type them? When you tell me I should get more help, that's really something to hear."

"It wasn't technicians or office staff I was thinking about," O'Donnell told him quietly. "When I said help I meant another pathologist. Someone to help you run the department, modernize things. Some bright young fellow who could relieve you of some duties."

"I don't need another pathologist." It was a flat statement, vehement and uncompromising. "There's not enough work for two qualified men. I can handle all the pathology myself—without any help. Give me a few days and we'll be caught up on surgicals."

It was obvious that Joe Pearson had no intention of giving way. Was it because he was unwilling to divide his personal empire, or was he simply protecting his job—fearful that a new and younger man might undermine him? Actually the idea of removing Pearson had not occurred to O'Donnell. He liked Pearson's directness, and in the field of pathological anatomy alone his long experience would be hard to replace. "Joe," O'Donnell said, "there's no question of any major change. You'd still be in charge . . ."

"In that case let me run Pathology my own way."

O'Donnell still wanted to avoid a showdown. He would drop it for a day or two. He said quietly, "I'd think it over if I were you."

"There's nothing to think over." Pearson was at the door. He nodded curtly and went out.

So there it is, O'Donnell thought. We've laid the lines of battle. He stood there, considering what the next move should be.

Chapter 3

THE THREE COUNTIES cafeteria was the meeting-place for most of the hospital staff and employees: the root centre of the hospital grapevine, its stems and branches extending to every section and department. Promotions, scandals, firings and hirings were known and discussed in the cafeteria long before official word was ever published.

Medical staff frequently used the cafeteria for "kerbstone consultations" with colleagues, and weighty specialist opinions, which at other times would be followed by a substantial bill, were often tossed out freely, sometimes to the great advantage of a patient. A few staff doctors resented this informal use of their arduously acquired talents, saying, "I think we'd better set up a consultation in my office. I'll have the

meter running then." But most of the staff felt they had as much to gain as to lose.

With few exceptions the senior attending doctors used the tables set aside for the medical staff. Residents and housemen, however, sometimes asserted their independence by joining the nurses or other groups. There was nothing unusual, therefore, in Mike Seddons dropping into a chair opposite Vivian Loburton, who happened to be eating lunch alone.

Since they had met ten days ago in the autopsy-room, Vivian had encountered Mike Seddons several times and she had increasingly come to like the look of him. She had expected that soon he might approach her directly. Now here he was.

"Hi!" Seddons said. "I'm here to proposition you."

Vivian said, "I thought that was supposed to come later."

Mike Seddons grinned. "Haven't you heard?—this is the jet age. No time for formal frills. Here's my proposition: theatre the day after tomorrow, preceded by dinner at the Cuban Grill."

Vivian asked curiously, "Can you afford it?" Among house staff and student nurses poverty was a time-honoured, rueful joke.

Seddons lowered his voice to a stage whisper. "Don't tell a soul, but I'm on to a side line. Those patients we get in autopsy. A lot of 'em have gold fillings in their teeth . . ."

"Oh, shut up; you'll ruin my lunch."

Mike produced two tickets from his pocket and a printed voucher. "Take a look at this—compliments of a grateful patient." The tickets were for a Broadway musical which was on tour. The voucher covered dinner for two at the Cuban Grill. "I filled in for half an hour for Frank Worth in Casualty. A guy had a bad gash on his hand and I stitched it. Next thing I knew, these were in the mail." He chuckled. "Worth is furious. Says he'll never leave his post again. Well, will you come?"

"I'd love to," Vivian said, and meant it.

"Great! I'll pick you up at the nurses' home at seven." As he spoke Mike was suddenly aware that this girl had a good deal more than a pretty face and a good figure. When she looked at him and smiled it conveyed the feeling of something warm and fragrant. Then a warning voice inside him cautioned: Beware entanglements! Remember the

Seddons policy: love 'em and leave 'em. Parting is such sweet sorrow but, oh, so very practical for staying unattached! He reached over for two of Vivian's chipped potatoes. "Not bad," he said. "I must eat more often."

A WEEK and a half had passed since Tomaselli had told O'Donnell that new hospital construction could begin in the spring, and he, Kent O'Donnell and Orden Brown were meeting in the administrator's office to discuss immediate things to be done.

Months before, with an architect at their elbows, the three had worked over the detailed plans for each section which would have its home in the new wing. The wishes of heads of medical departments had to be balanced against the money likely to be available. Orden Brown had been the arbiter, with O'Donnell as medical liaison. Now, with the main planning completed, came the practical matter of getting the money. Strictly speaking, this was the responsibility of the board of directors, but the medical staff was expected to help. Brown said, "We're suggesting some quotas for the doctors—six thousand dollars for senior attending doctors, four thousand for associates, two thousand for assistants."

O'Donnell whistled softly. He told the chairman, "I'm afraid there'll be some complaining."

Harry Tomaselli put in, "The money can be spread over four years, Kent. As long as we have signed pledges we can use them to borrow from the bank."

"There's another thing," Brown said. "When word gets round town that this is what the doctors themselves are giving, it will help our general fund-raising a good deal."

O'Donnell could visualize the pained expressions he would face when he broke the news at a medical-staff meeting. Most medical men, like the majority of people nowadays, lived right up to their incomes.

Harry Tomaselli, intuitive as usual, said, "Don't worry, Kent. We'll have all the selling points lined up. In fact, when you've finished some people may even want to exceed the quota."

"Don't count on it." O'Donnell smiled. "You're about to touch a number of doctors on their tenderest nerve—the pocket-book."

Tomaselli grinned back. He knew that when O'Donnell made his

appeal to the staff it would be incisive and thorough. It was good to work with someone of O'Donnell's character. In Tomaselli's last hospital the president of the medical board had been a man who courted popularity and trimmed his sails to every wind of opinion. As a result there had been no real leadership and hospital standards had suffered.

Orden Brown was telling O'Donnell, "There'll be a good deal of social activity, of course, once the campaign gets going. It would be a good thing, Kent, if we put you in as a speaker at the Rotary Club."

O'Donnell, who disliked public meetings, had been about to grimace but checked himself. Instead he said, "If you think it will help."

"I'll fix it up. That had better be the opening week of the campaign. The following week we can do the same thing with the Kiwanis."

O'Donnell considered suggesting that the chairman should leave him some time for surgery, but he thought better of it.

"By the way," Brown was saying, "are you free for dinner the day after tomorrow? I'd like you to come with me to Eustace Swayne's."

"Yes, I'll be glad to come." The invitation to the home of the board of directors' most die-hard member was unexpected: O'Donnell had met Swayne a few times but did not know him well.

"As a matter of fact, it's my suggestion," Brown said, rising. "It will be just a small party. I'd like you to talk with him about the hospital generally, let him absorb some of your ideas."

"I'll do what I can." O'Donnell did not relish the thought of getting close to board politics. So far he had managed to steer clear of them. But he could not say no to Orden Brown.

The door had scarcely closed on the chairman when Tomaselli's secretary came in. "I'm sorry to interrupt," she said. "There's a man on the phone who insists on talking to you. A Mr. Bryan. He's very insistent. He says he's the husband of a patient."

Tomaselli reached for the telephone. "Administrator speaking." His tone was friendly. Then he frowned slightly, listening to what was coming from the other end of the line. O'Donnell could hear the receiver diaphragm rattling sharply. He caught the words, "Disgraceful . . . imposition on a family . . . should be an inquiry."

Tomaselli listened for a moment, then said, "Now, Mr. Bryan, suppose you start at the beginning. Tell me what this is all about." He reached for a pad and pencil. "Now tell me, please, when was your

wife admitted to the hospital?" The phone rattled again and the administrator made a swift note. "And who was your doctor?" Again a note. "And the date of discharge?" A pause. "Yes, I see."

O'Donnell heard the words, "Can't get any satisfaction," then Tomaselli was talking again.

"No, Mr. Bryan, I don't remember the particular case. But I will make some inquiries. I promise you that." He listened, then answered, "Yes, sir, I do know what a hospital bill means to a family. But the hospital doesn't make any profit, you know."

O'Donnell could still hear the voice on the telephone, but it sounded calmer, responding to Tomaselli's conciliatory approach. Now the administrator said, "Well, sir, it's the doctor who decides how long a patient remains in the hospital. I think you should have another talk with your wife's doctor, and what I'll do meanwhile is get our treasurer to go over your bill, item by item." He listened briefly, then, "Thank you, Mr. Bryan. Good-bye."

"What was the trouble?" O'Donnell asked casually.

"He claims his wife was kept in too long. Now he has to go into debt to pay the bill."

O'Donnell said sharply, "How does he know she was in too long?"

"He says he's checked round—whatever that means," Tomaselli said. "It may have been necessary, of course, but she *was* here nearly three weeks. Normally I wouldn't think much about it. But we've had an unusual number of complaints on the same lines."

Something flashed through O'Donnell's mind: the word *Pathology*. Aloud he said: "Who was the attending doctor?"

Tomaselli glanced at his notes. "Reubens."

"Let's see if we can get him and clear this up now."

Tomaselli touched an intercom set. "Kathy," he said to his secretary, "see if you can find Dr. Reubens."

From the corridor outside they could hear a soft voice on the hospital public-address system. "Dr. Reubens, Dr. Reubens." After a moment the phone buzzed, and O'Donnell lifted the receiver. "Reub. It's Kent O'Donnell."

"What can I do for you?" Reubens, one of the senior surgeons, had a thin, precise voice.

"Do you have a patient named Mrs. Bryan?"

"That's right. What's the matter? Husband been complaining?"

"You know about it then?"

"Of course I know about it." Reubens sounded annoyed. "Personally I think he has good reason to complain."

"What's the story, Reub?"

"The story is that I admitted Mrs. Bryan for possible carcinoma of the breast. I removed a tumour. It turned out to be benign."

"Then why keep her here for three weeks?"

There was a silence. Then the thin, clipped voice said, "It was two and a half weeks before I found out the tumour *was* benign. That's how long it took Joe Pearson to get it under his microscope."

"Did you remind him about it?"

"If I called him once I called him half a dozen times. He'd probably have been longer if I hadn't kept after it. Incidentally, you'd better talk to some of the other men. I'm not the only one."

"I know. Frankly, I thought things had improved a little."

"Not so's you'd notice it. It's too bad. Husband's a decent little guy—a carpenter or something like that, works for himself. He didn't have any insurance. This'll set 'em back for a long time." O'Donnell made no answer. His mind was already running ahead, thinking of what came next. Again the thin voice on the phone: "Well, is that all?"

"Yes, Reub; that's all. Thanks." He hung up and turned to Tomaselli. "Harry, I want a meeting this afternoon." He checked over names in his mind. "We'll want Harvey Chandler, of course, as chief of Medicine. Better have Bill Rufus, and Reubens."

"How about Lucy Grainger?"

Briefly, O'Donnell hesitated. "Yes. And Charlie Dornberger. We'll meet here, if that's convenient, and I'd like you to be here too. There'll be just one subject—changes in Pathology."

O'DONNELL had hesitated because he was remembering his dinner with Lucy Grainger at the Roosevelt Hotel the night before. It had been a pleasant, relaxed occasion, and they had talked lightly of themselves, of people they had known, and their own experiences in and out of medicine.

Afterwards O'Donnell had driven Lucy home. She had recently moved into a large, fashionable apartment building on the north

side of town. She had said, "You'll come in for a nightcap, of course?"

Her fifth-floor apartment was tastefully furnished, its subdued lighting inviting.

"I'll mix us a drink," she said.

Her back was to him. Ice clinked in glasses. O'Donnell said, "Lucy, you've never married. I've sometimes wondered why."

"It's very simple really. It's quite some time since I was asked." Lucy turned, carrying the drinks she had mixed. She gave O'Donnell his, then moved to a chair. She said thoughtfully, "There was only one occasion that mattered. I was a good deal younger then. At the time a career in medicine seemed terribly important. That and marriage didn't seem to go together."

He asked casually, "Any regrets?"

Lucy considered. "Not really, I suppose. I've achieved what I wanted, and it's been rewarding in many ways. Oh, sometimes one wonders how things would have turned out with a different decision, but after all, that's human, isn't it?"

"I suppose so." O'Donnell felt strangely moved. There was a sense of depth and tenderness about Lucy. She should have children, he thought. He had asked, "Do you still feel the same way about marriage and medicine—for you, that is?"

"I'm no longer dogmatic about anything." She smiled. "That, at least, I've learned."

O'Donnell wondered what marriage to Lucy would be like. Would there be love and mellowness? How might they spend their hours of leisure? Would the talk be intimate and domestic? Or would it be of hospital affairs, with charts on the table at dinner and diagnostic problems for dessert?

Aloud he said, "I've always thought, you know, that we have a good deal in common."

"Yes, Kent," Lucy answered, "so have I."

O'Donnell finished his drink, then rose to leave. He realized they had both said a good deal more than had passed in words. But too much was involved for hasty decisions. He took her hands. "Good night, Lucy. Let's think about all this."

When the lift doors had closed she was still standing at the open apartment door.

Chapter 4

"**I** ASKED you here," O'Donnell told the group round the board-room table, "because I'd like your support in something I want to do. I think we all know there's a problem in Pathology. I believe, too, you'll agree it's a personal problem as well as medical."

"What kind of a problem?" It was Charlie Dornberger. As the elderly obstetrician talked he filled his pipe. "I'm not sure I know what you're getting at, Kent."

O'Donnell had expected something like this. He knew that Dornberger and Pearson were close friends. He said, "I'd like you to hear me out, Charlie, if you will. I'll try to make it clear."

Methodically he went over the issues involved—the delays in surgical reports, the incidents with Rufus and Reubens, the increasing service the hospital required from its Pathology department and his own doubts that Joe Pearson could cope with them alone. He told them of his own interview with Pearson and the old man's refusal to accept a second pathologist. He concluded: "I'm convinced we do need a new man to help Joe out. I want your support in seeing that one is brought in."

"I've been concerned about Pathology too." Harvey Chandler, the chief of Medicine, spoke rather pompously, as usual. "But the situation may be difficult. After all, he's a department head. We ought to avoid any suggestion of undermining his authority."

"I agree," O'Donnell responded, "and that's why I want some help in convincing Joe Pearson that changes are necessary."

"I'm not sure I like the way we're doing this," Bill Rufus said. "Just a few of us, meeting like this. Certainly I've had some tussles with Joe Pearson. But that doesn't mean I'm going to join some hole-and-corner conspiracy to boot him out."

O'Donnell was ready for this. "Let me say emphatically," he said, "that there is no intention on my part or anybody else's of—as you put it—booting Dr. Pearson out. But there seems to be agreement that changes in Pathology are necessary. Of course, I could have called the executive committee together. I still will if I have to, but Joe is a member of the executive himself and any discussion will mean a showdown. Assuming we force the issue, what have we gained? We've proved to

Joe Pearson that he's no longer in charge of his own department."

"I'm not saying I go along with you, but what's your suggestion?" The question came from Charlie Dornberger. He punctuated it with puffs of smoke as his pipe got going.

O'Donnell decided to lay it on the line. "My suggestion, Charlie, is that you approach Joe—on behalf of the rest of us."

"Oh no!" The reaction from Dornberger was much what O'Donnell had anticipated. He settled in to be persuasive.

"Charlie, you're a close friend of Joe's. You could persuade him about this."

"In other words, you want me to carry your axe."

"Charlie, it isn't an axe; believe me."

Dornberger hesitated. He observed that the others were watching him, waiting for his answer. He debated, torn by two conflicting feelings—his concern for the hospital's good and his own relationship with Joe Pearson. The two incidents concerning Rufus and Reubens had shocked him inexpressibly. Dornberger knew also that O'Donnell was seriously concerned, and he respected the chief of Surgery's judgment. Also he had appeared to be sincere when he said there was no intention of booting Pearson out. Dornberger decided that perhaps he could be the intermediary. Possibly this way he could help Joe best.

"Very well," he said. "I'll see what I can do. Is this unanimous?" he added, and Lucy nodded with the rest.

"We're all fond of Joe," she said, "but some changes are necessary."

There was a momentary silence, and O'Donnell sensed a feeling of relief. Medical protocol was complicated. In industry, if a man was not doing his job adequately, you fired him. But in a hospital the lines of authority were seldom clear-cut, and a medical-department head was pretty well master in his own domain. And besides, you were dealing with more than just a job. You were questioning the ability of a man who, like yourself, was entirely dependent on his professional reputation. So you proceeded warily, keeping things like this under wraps, carefully guarded from outside scrutiny.

Harry Tomaselli said softly, "I take it, then, we're going to look for an available pathologist."

"I think we should begin to look around," O'Donnell answered. He glanced at the others. "I imagine most of us have contacts where we

might pass the word along. If you hear of a good man, just finishing his residency perhaps, I'd like you to let me know."

Harry Tomaselli removed a file folder from one of his desk drawers. He said, "Something here may interest you. Frankly, I anticipated something like this and I've been receiving the 'open list' of pathologists lately. This name came in a week or two ago."

"May I see?" O'Donnell reached for the paper Tomaselli had produced. The so-called "open list" of pathologists openly available for appointments was circulated periodically to hospitals on request. There was also a "closed list" held in confidence by the pathologists' professional society for men seeking more discreetly to make a change.

O'Donnell glanced over the sheet Tomaselli gave him. The listing was for a Dr. David Coleman, age thirty-one. O'Donnell's eyebrows went up as he noted Coleman's record and experience. A New York University honours graduate. Houseman at Bellevue. Two years in the Army, mostly in pathology. A five-year pathology residency spread over three good hospitals. He passed the paper to Rufus. "I doubt very much if he'd look at us," he told Tomaselli. "Not with those qualifications and what we could pay to begin with."

Rufus glanced up. "I agree. This man can take his pick of the big city hospitals." He passed the sheet to Harvey Chandler.

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ." Tomaselli sounded unusually diffident. "The fact is, Dr. Coleman is interested in this hospital. I gather he's heard something of our recent changes and plans for the future. I know because we've had some correspondence."

Rufus said, "Isn't that a little unusual, Harry?"

"Perhaps I was being premature, but after the list came I wrote to Dr. Coleman. It was just a tentative approach, of course, sounding him out." He looked at O'Donnell. "It was after our conversation ten days ago, Kent."

"You say he's interested?"

"Yes. He'd like to come and see us."

The paper had passed to Dornberger, who tapped it with a forefinger. "What do you want me to do about this?"

O'Donnell glanced at the others, seeking confirmation. "I think you should take it with you, Charlie," he said. "And I suggest you show it to Joe Pearson."

IN AN ANNEX to the autopsy-room Roger McNeil, the pathology resident, was almost ready for gross conference. All that was necessary was the presence of Dr. Joseph Pearson.

At Three Counties, as at many hospitals, a gross conference was the second stage after an autopsy. Half an hour ago George Rinne, *diener* of the mortuary, had brought in the organs removed at three autopsies earlier in the week. As McNeil looked round, making a final check, he heard the familiar, half-shuffling footsteps, and Pearson came in, the inevitable cloud of cigar smoke with him.

"Can't waste any time." Pearson seldom bothered with preliminaries. "It's ten days since I had that set-to with O'Donnell, and we're still behind." The cigar bobbed up and down. "When this is over I want a check on all surgicals outstanding. What's the first case?" While he had been talking he had put on a black rubber apron and rubber gloves. Now he came to the stone table in the middle of the room and sat down at it.

McNeil looked over the case notes. "Fifty-five-year-old woman. Doctor's cause of death, carcinoma of the breast."

"Let me see." Pearson reached for the file. Sometimes he would sit patiently while the resident described a case; at other times he would want to read everything himself. In this, as in all things, he was unpredictable. "Hm." He put down the papers and began to examine the woman's heart, while McNeil balanced a clip board on his knee and prepared to write. Pearson dictated: "Heart shows a slight thickening and rolling of the mitral valve. The chordae tendineae are fused, shortened and thickened. . . . Looks as if she had an old rheumatic fever. Not a cause of death though." He cut away a portion of tissue and put it into a labelled jar for microscopic examination later.

Next he examined the lungs. He opened the first lung like the two big leaves of a book, then dictated to McNeil, "Lungs show multiple metastatic nodules." He held out the tissue for the resident to see.

A door behind him opened. "You busy, Dr. Pearson?"

Pearson turned irritably. The voice was that of Carl Bannister, the senior laboratory technician. Bannister had his head round the door tentatively; there was another figure behind him in the corridor.

"Of course I'm busy. What do you want?" It was the tone, half snarling, half bantering, Pearson habitually used to Bannister.

Bannister was unperturbed. He beckoned to the figure behind him. "This is John Alexander. You remember—our new lab. technician. You hired him a week ago. He starts work today."

"Oh yes. I'd forgotten this was the day. Come in." Pearson sounded more cordial than he had been with Bannister. McNeil thought: Maybe he doesn't want to scare a new employee first day out. He looked curiously at the newcomer. He had heard that Alexander was fresh from college with a degree in medical technology. Well, they could do with someone like that about the place. Bannister, for sure, wasn't any Louis Pasteur.

McNeil turned his eyes to the senior technician. As usual, Bannister looked like a minor-league Pearson. His short, paunchy body was partially covered by a stained, unbuttoned lab. coat; his clothes beneath it appeared shabby and unpressed. Bannister had come to Three Counties a year or two after Pearson's arrival. Pearson had hired him for odd jobs—stock clerk, messenger, washing glassware. Gradually, as the years passed, Bannister had learned a lot of practical things round the laboratory, becoming more and more a right hand to Pearson. He had been in the department so long that he could fill in if necessary for technicians in other sections of the lab. Because of this Pearson had pushed a good deal of administrative laboratory work on to him, leaving him, in effect, in charge of all pathology technicians.

McNeil thought it likely that, with more education, Bannister might have risen to better things. As it was, he had the experience but not the theory. Much of his work in the laboratory was from rote rather than reasoning: he could do serologic and chemical tests but without any real understanding of the science behind them. McNeil had often thought that one day this might prove dangerous.

Alexander, of course, was a different proposition. He had come the way of most laboratory technicians nowadays, with three years of college behind him, the last year in an approved school for medical technologists. The word "technologist" was sometimes a sore point with people like Bannister who only rated the styling "technician." In his spotless lab. coat, crew cut, pressed trousers and shined shoes, Alexander presented a contrast to Pearson as well as Bannister.

"Do you think you'll like it here?" Pearson looked down at the lungs he was holding, continuing the examination while he talked.

"I'm sure I will, Doctor."

"Well, John," Pearson said, "you'll discover we have certain ways of doing things. They may not always be the ways you've been used to, but we find they work pretty well for us."

"I understand, Doctor."

Do you? McNeil thought. Do you understand he is really telling you that he doesn't want any changes here—that there's to be no nonsense with ideas you may have picked up at school?

Pearson abruptly changed the subject. "Are you married?"

"Yes, sir. I am."

"Your wife here with you?"

"Not yet. She's coming on next week from Chicago. I thought I'd find us a place to live first." Alexander hesitated, then he added, "There was something I wanted to ask you, Dr. Pearson. My wife is pregnant and I was wondering if you could recommend an obstetrician." He paused. "This baby is pretty important to us. You see, we lost our first child. A month after she was born."

Pearson had stopped work now and was listening carefully. "That's easy," he said. "Dr. Dornberger's a good man. He has a room here in the hospital. Would you like me to call him?"

"If it's not too much trouble."

Pearson picked up the phone and asked for an extension. After a pause he boomed, "That you, Charlie? I've got a patient for you."

In his room four floors above, Dr. Charles Dornberger smiled and moved the telephone slightly away from his ear. He asked, "What can obstetrics do for your kind of patients?" At the same time he reflected that this call was convenient. Since the meeting yesterday, Dornberger had speculated on the best method of approach to Joe Pearson. Now an opportunity was presenting itself.

Down in Pathology Pearson manoeuvred the cigar to a corner of his mouth. He always enjoyed exchanges with Dornberger.

"This is a live patient, you old fool. Wife of one of my lab. boys, John Alexander. They're new in town. Don't know anybody."

As Pearson mentioned the name Dornberger opened a file drawer and selected a blank card. In a fine script he wrote, *Alexander, Mrs. John*. "Be glad to oblige, Joe," he said. "Will you get them to call me for an appointment?"

"All right." He grinned at Alexander, then shouted, "And if they want twins, Charlie, it's up to you to see they get them. And another thing! None of your fancy fees for this job. I don't want the boy coming to me for a rise so he can pay his doctor's bill."

Dornberger smiled. He said, "Don't worry." On the card he made a note, *Hospital employee*. This was a patient he would charge no fee. Into the phone he said, "Joe, there's something I want to talk to you about. When would be a convenient time to see you?"

"Can't make it today, Charlie," Pearson said. "Got a full schedule. How about tomorrow?"

Dornberger consulted his own appointment list. "How about around ten in the morning? I'll come to your office."

"All right, Charlie. See you then. So long." Impatiently Pearson replaced the phone. To Alexander, he said, "That's all fixed. Your wife can be admitted to this hospital when she comes to term. Because you're an employee you'll get a twenty per cent discount."

Alexander was beaming. McNeil thought: Yes, go ahead; enjoy it, my friend. This is one of the old man's good moments. But make no mistake—there'll be others, and those you won't enjoy at all.

"YOU'RE NEW here, aren't you?" Dr. Dornberger smiled at the student nurse who had come in while he was talking with Pearson.

Vivian Loburton had brought a patient's chart that Dornberger had asked to see. Ordinarily doctors would have to walk to the ward and look at the chart there. But Dornberger was a favourite with the nurses; they were always doing little things for him.

"Fairly new, Doctor," Vivian said. "This is my fourth month in nursing school."

He noticed she had a soft voice with a lilt. Pretty too. "That was Dr. Pearson, our pathologist," he said. "Have you met him yet?"

"Yes," Vivian said. "Our class went to an autopsy."

"Oh dear. How did you . . ." He was going to say "like it" but changed it to "How did you find it?"

Vivian considered. "At first it was rather a shock. Afterwards I didn't mind too much though."

He nodded sympathetically, and held out his hand for the chart. "I'll only be a moment with this, if you'd like to wait."

"All right, Doctor." A few minutes respite from the rush of ward work would be welcome. It was cool in here with the air conditioning. There was no such luxury in the nurses' home.

Vivian watched Dr. Dornberger as he studied the chart. He was lean and angular, with a sparkle to him. Vivian had heard he was much beloved by his women patients. There was little need to wonder why.

"We'll be seeing each other, I expect," Dornberger said as he handed back the chart and opened the door courteously. "Good luck in your studies."

"Good-bye, Doctor." She went out, leaving a trace of fragrance behind her. Not for the first time the contact with someone youthful left Dornberger wondering about himself. He returned to the swivel-chair and leaned back meditatively.

He had been in medicine now for almost thirty-two years—full years and rewarding ones. Financially he had no problems. His own four children were married, and he and his wife could live comfortably on the careful investments he had made. But would he be content to retire and rusticate? That was the rub.

In all his years in medicine Charles Dornberger had prided himself on keeping up to date. He read avidly, and had made up his mind long ago that no young newcomer was going to surpass him, either in technique or knowledge. And yet he had never resented younger men. He admired and respected O'Donnell. He considered the youthful chief of Surgery one of the best things that had ever happened to Three Counties.

He had made many friends, some in unlikely places. Joe Pearson might be called one of the unlikely ones. Professionally the two men looked at a lot of things in different ways. Dornberger knew, for example, that Joe did not read much these days. He suspected that in a few areas of knowledge the elderly pathologist had slipped behind the times, and, administratively, there was the problem which yesterday's meeting had revealed. And yet, over the years, the bond between the two men had grown strong. To his own surprise sometimes he had found himself siding with Pearson at medical conferences and defending him occasionally when Pathology was criticized in private.

But there was still his own problem. To quit or not to quit? Just lately, despite his carefully guarded physical fitness, he had found himself tiring; night calls had seemed harder to take.

Of one thing he was sure: he would not hang on if he found himself weakening. Right now his mind was clear, his hands steady and eyes sharp as ever. He watched himself carefully because he knew that at the first sign of failing he would clear his desk and go. He had seen too many others try to stay the course too long. That would never be for him.

Chapter 5

"I'M NOT EVEN sure that defeating polio was a good thing."

The speaker was Eustace Swayne; the background, the oak-panelled library of Swayne's imposing mansion, set in fifty acres of park on the fringes of Burlington.

"Come now, you can't be serious," Orden Brown said lightly. He smiled at the two women in the room—his own wife, Amelia, and Swayne's daughter, Denise Quantz.

"I am serious." Eustace Swayne leaned forward. "Oh, show me a child in leg braces and I'll cringe with the rest and reach for my cheque book. But the fact is—and I challenge anyone to deny it—we're busily engaged in weakening the human race."

It was a familiar argument. Kent O'Donnell said courteously, "Would you suggest that we should stop medical research, freeze our knowledge and techniques, not try to conquer any more diseases?"

"You couldn't do it," Swayne said, "any more than you could have stopped the Gadarene swine jumping off their cliff."

O'Donnell laughed. "I'm not sure I like the analogy. But if that is so, then why the argument?"

"Why?" Swayne banged a fist on the arm of his chair. "Because you can still deplore something, even though there's nothing you can do to force a change."

"I see." O'Donnell was not sure he wanted to get deeper into this discussion. It might not help his relations with Swayne, which was really why he had come here. He glanced round at the others in the room. Amelia Brown caught his eye and smiled. The chairman's wife was well informed about hospital politics.

Swayne's married daughter, Denise Quantz, was listening intently. At dinner O'Donnell had several times found his eyes travelling, almost involuntarily, in Mrs. Quantz's direction. In contrast to the rugged,



hard-bitten man at the table's head, the daughter was gentle and softly spoken. She was beautiful too, O'Donnell thought, with the rare mature loveliness which sometimes comes to a woman at forty. He had gathered from the conversation that Denise was either separated or divorced, and that she lived in New York, though she came to Burlington fairly frequently. He found himself comparing Denise with Lucy Grainger: Lucy with her professional career, and Denise Quantz, a woman of leisure and independence. O'Donnell wondered which kind of woman was better for a man: one who was close to his working life, or someone separate and detached, with other interests beyond the daily round. Now Denise said, "Surely you're not going to give up so easily, Dr. O'Donnell. Please don't let my father get away with that."

The old man snorted. "There's nothing to get away with. It's a perfectly clear situation. For years the natural balance of Nature kept populations in check. When the birth rate became too great there were famines to offset it and the weak were eliminated."

"Do you mean the weak or the unfortunate?" O'Donnell said.

"I mean what I say—the weak." The old man's voice had a sharper tone, but O'Donnell sensed he was enjoying this. "When there was a plague or an epidemic, it was the weak who were wiped out and the strong survived to sire the next generation. I tell you, medicine today is preserving cripples and weaklings, people who should be allowed to die. We're letting them pass on their uselessness to their children and their children's children. We're breeding people who are weak, weak, weak!"

The old man had almost shouted the words. Now a bout of coughing seized him. I'd better go easy, O'Donnell thought. He probably has high blood pressure. Quietly and reasonably he put into words what he felt he had to express, to himself as well as to the others. "Medicine has only one real problem," he said. "It's always been the same; it always will. It's the problem of individual human survival. That's why we fought polio, Mr. Swayne, and smallpox, and typhus, and syphilis. It's why we're still fighting cancer and all the rest. It's the reason we have homes for incurables. We preserve all the people we can, the weak as well as the strong. Because it adds up to one thing—survival, the oldest law of Nature. It's the standard of medicine, the only one we can possibly have."

For a moment he expected Swayne to lash back, but the old man was silent. Then he looked over at his daughter. "Pour Dr. O'Donnell some more brandy, Denise."

O'Donnell held out his glass as she approached with the decanter. There was a soft rustle to her dress, and as she leaned towards him he had an absurd, boyish impulse to reach out and touch her soft dark hair. She moved over to her father, replenished the old man's glass, and asked, "If you really feel the way you say, Father, what are you doing on a hospital board?"

Swayne chuckled. "Mostly I'm there because Orden and some others are hoping I won't change my will." He looked over at Orden Brown. "They reckon there can't be long to wait in any case."

"You're doing your friends an injustice, Eustace," Brown said. His tone contained the right mixture of banter and seriousness.

"And you're a liar." The old man was enjoying himself again. "You asked a question, Denise. Well, I'll answer it. I'm on the hospital board because I'm a practical man. The world's the way it is and I can't change it. But what someone like me can be is a balancing force. Oh, I know some of you think I'm just an obstructionist!" Swayne shot a half-amused, half-malicious glance at the board chairman. "But every activity needs a brake on it somewhere. That's what I've been—a brake, a steadying force. And when I'm gone perhaps you and your friends will find you need another."

"You're talking nonsense, Eustace. Now you're doing your own motives an injustice," Orden Brown said. "You've done as many good things in Burlington as any man I know."

The old man seemed to shrink back into his chair. He grumbled, "How do any of us really know our motives?" Then, looking up, "I suppose you'll expect a big donation from me for this extension."

Orden Brown said smoothly, "Frankly, we hope you'll see fit to make your usual generous contribution."

Softly, unexpectedly, Eustace Swayne said, "I suppose a quarter of a million dollars would be acceptable."

O'Donnell heard Brown's quickly indrawn breath. Such a gift would be far more than they had expected, even in their most sanguine moments. Brown said, "Frankly, Eustace, I'm overwhelmed."

"No need to be." The old man paused, twirling the stem of his

brandy glass. "I haven't decided yet, though I've been considering it. I'll tell you in a week or two." Abruptly he turned to O'Donnell. "You know Joe Pearson, of course."

"Yes. Very well."

"I've known Dr. Pearson for many years." The words were slow and deliberate. Did they have an undertone of warning? "In my opinion he is one of the best-qualified men on the hospital staff. I hope he stays in charge of his department for many years to come. I respect his ability and his judgment—completely."

Well, there it is, O'Donnell thought—an ultimatum. In plain words, Eustace Swayne had said: If you want my quarter of a million dollars, hands off Joe Pearson!

LATER Orden Brown, Amelia and O'Donnell had driven back together across town. They had been silent at first, then Amelia said, "Do you really think—a quarter of a million?"

Her husband answered, "He's quite capable of giving it—if he feels inclined."

O'Donnell asked, "I take it you received the message?"

"Yes." Brown said it calmly, without embellishment and without seeking to pursue the subject. O'Donnell thought: Thank you for that. He knew this had to be his problem, not the chairman's.

They dropped him at his apartment. As they said good night Amelia added, "By the way, Kent, Denise is separated but not divorced. She has two children at school. And she's thirty-nine."

Orden Brown asked her, "Why are you telling him all that?"

Amelia smiled. "Because he wanted to know." She touched her husband's arm. "You could never be a woman, dear."

Watching the Lincoln move away, O'Donnell wondered how she had known. Perhaps she had overheard him saying good night to Denise Quantz. He had said politely that he hoped he would see her again. She had answered, "I live in New York. Why don't you ring me next time you're there?" Now O'Donnell wondered if, after all, he might take in a surgeons' congress in New York which he had decided not to attend.

A voice said, "Good night, Dr. O'Donnell," and he looked round. It was one of the surgical residents, Seddons, with a pretty brunette whose

face seemed familiar. Probably one of the student nurses, he thought. He smiled at them both and said "Good night." Then, using his pass-key, he went through the glass doors into the lift.

VIVIAN SAID, "He looked worried."

Seddons answered cheerfully, "I doubt it, bright eyes. When you get to where he is, most of the worrying is behind you."

The theatre was over and they were walking back to Three Counties, talking of themselves. Now Mike asked Vivian why she had become a student nurse. "Nursing is something I've wanted to do as far back as I can remember, Mike," she said. She had told him that her parents at first had opposed the idea, then, on learning how strongly she felt, had given way. "Now and then, when you're tired," she went on, "and you've seen some of the things in the hospital, you wonder if it's worth it. Most of the time, though, I'm quite sure." She smiled. "I'm a very determined person, Mike. I've made up my mind to be a nurse."

Yes, he thought, you are determined; I can believe that. He could sense an inner strength in her. Once more Mike felt his interest quicken, but again he warned himself: No involvements! It was close to midnight, but Vivian had signed the late book and there was no problem about hurrying in. He touched her arm. "Let's go through the park."

Vivian laughed. "That's a line I've heard before." But she offered no resistance as he steered her into the park.

"I've a whole collection of old lines. It's one of my specialities." He took her hand. "Do you want to hear more?"

"Like what, for example?" Despite her self-assurance her voice held the slightest of tremors.

"Like this." Mike stopped and took both her shoulders, turning her to face him. Then he kissed her fully on the lips.

Vivian felt her heart beat faster, but not so much that her mind could not weigh the situation. Should she stop at once or let this go on? She already knew that she liked Mike and believed she could come to like him a good deal more. He was physically attractive and they were both young. Mike tightened his arms round her, his hands were caressing her back. She knew clearly, as if with a second mind, that, if she were going to, this was the moment to break away. Just a moment longer, she thought; just a moment longer!

Then suddenly it seemed as if this were an intermission, a release. Moments of warmth and tenderness these past months had been so few! So many times since coming to Three Counties she had had to use control and self-discipline, her emotions pent up and tears unshed. When you were young, inexperienced and a little frightened, sometimes it was hard to do. There had been so many things—the shocks of ward duty, pain, disease, death, the autopsy. A nurse, even a student nurse, had to see so much of suffering and give so much in care and sympathy. Was it wrong, then, to grasp a moment of tenderness for herself? For an instant, with Mike holding her, she felt the same solace and relief as when, years before, she had run as a little girl into her mother's arms.

Mike had released her a little now and was holding her slightly away. He said, "You're beautiful." Impulsively she buried her face in his shoulder.

Suddenly she felt a searing pain, and, involuntarily, cried out. The pain was so intense at first she could not be sure where it was. Then she knew it was her left knee.

"What is it, Vivian?" She could see Mike was puzzled, not knowing what to make of it. She thought: He probably thinks it's a trick. Girls do this sort of thing to get out of these situations.

The first sharpness of pain had subsided a little. But it still returned in waves. She said, "Mike, I'm afraid it's my knee. It hurts terribly. I have to sit down." She could tell he was sceptical, but he led her to a near-by park bench, and when she had rested Vivian said, "I'm sorry. I didn't do that on purpose."

He said doubtfully, "All right. Tell me what's wrong."

"It's my knee. All of a sudden—the sharpest pain."

"Let me see." He was down in front of her. "Which one?"

She lifted her skirt and indicated the left knee. He felt it carefully, his hands moving lightly. His behaviour now was professional, analytical. As he had been trained to do, he went methodically over the possibilities.

Watching him, Vivian thought: He's good; he'll be a fine doctor. She found herself wondering what it would be like—the two of them together always. As a nurse there would be so much she could do to help him. She told herself: This is ridiculous; we scarcely know each other. Then, momentarily, the pain returned and she winced.

Mike asked, "Has this happened before?"

"Once. About a month ago. It wasn't as bad as this though."

"Have you seen anybody about it?"

"No. Should I have?"

Non-committally he said, "Maybe." Then he added, "You will tomorrow anyway. I think Dr. Grainger would be the best one."

"Mike, is something wrong?" She felt an undercurrent of alarm.

"Probably not," he reassured her. "But there's a small lump there that shouldn't be. I'll talk with Lucy Grainger in the morning. Now we have to get you home."

The earlier mood was gone. It could not be recaptured, not tonight anyway, and both of them knew it.

Mike helped her up. His arm went round her, and he asked, feeling protective, "Do you think you can walk?"

Vivian told him, "Yes. The pain's gone now."

"We'll just go to the gate," he said. "We can get a taxi there." Then because she looked glum he added cheerfully, "That patient was a cheap skate. He didn't send any cab fare."

WHEN HE came down to the basement next morning, Dornberger found Dr. Pearson hunched over the binocular microscope, trying to catch up on his surgical reports. Filling his pipe and looking round the big drab room, Dornberger shivered. He said, "Every time I come here I feel like I'm going to get a chill."

Pearson chuckled. "We spray flu germs about—every morning. It discourages visitors." Then he asked, "What's on your mind?"

Dornberger wasted no time. "I'm a deputation, Joe. I'm supposed to handle you tactfully."

Pearson looked up. "What is this? More trouble?"

Their eyes met. Dornberger said quietly, "That depends. But it looks as if you may get an assistant pathologist."

Dornberger had expected an outburst, but Pearson was strangely quiet. He said thoughtfully, "Whether I want one or not, eh?"

Dornberger lit his pipe. "Yes, Joe." He made it definite; there was no point in holding back.

"I suppose O'Donnell is behind this." Pearson said it with a touch of bitterness but still quietly. As always, he was being unpredictable.

Dornberger answered, "Partly but not entirely."

Again surprisingly, "What do you think I should do?" It was a question asked by one friend of another.

Dornberger thought: I'm glad he's taking it this way. I can help him accept this, adjust to it. Aloud he said, "I don't believe you've much choice, Joe. You *are* behind with surgical reports, aren't you? And a few other things?"

For a moment he thought he had gone too far. He saw the other man brace up and waited for the storm to break. But again it did not. Instead, more strongly than before, but reasonably, Pearson said, "Sure, a few things need straightening out. I'll admit that. But there's nothing I can't handle, if I can just get the time to do it."

He *has* accepted it, Dornberger thought. He's just sounding off now. He said casually, "Well, maybe you'll get the time—with another pathologist." With equal casualness he pulled from his inside pocket the paper which the administrator had given him.

Pearson asked, "What's that?"

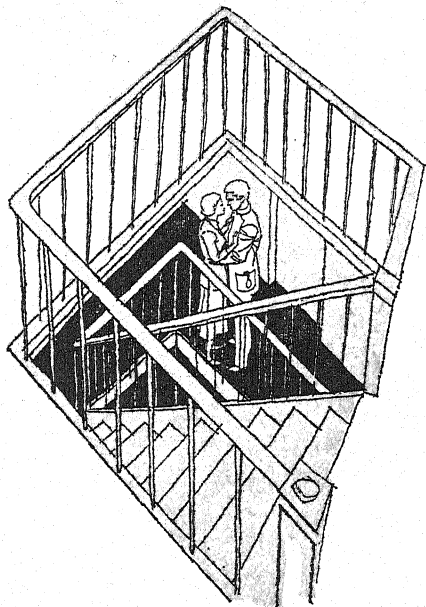
"There's nothing definite about this, Joe. It's a name that Harry Tomaselli had—apparently some young fellow who might be interested in coming here."

Pearson scanned the paper. "They sure didn't waste any time." He read aloud, "Dr. David Coleman." Then with bitterness, frustration and envy the old man added, "Age thirty-one."

IT WAS twenty past twelve, and the hospital cafeteria was at its busiest. Mrs. Straughan, as usual at this period, had her eye on proceedings, ensuring that as fast as one batch of food was used up another was brought from the kitchens to keep the line at the front moving briskly. She noticed a dish on top of a pile on the counter that appeared to have a mark on it. She stepped forward and removed it quickly; sure enough, it still bore traces of an earlier meal. The dishwashing machines again! she thought. They were a recurring problem. She decided to broach the subject with Tomaselli again very soon.

At one of the tables reserved for the medical staff Lucy Grainger said to Dr. Bell, the radiologist, "Ralph, I'm sending you a patient this afternoon. One of our student nurses—Vivian Loburton."

"What is it you're looking for?" Bell asked.



"I want some films of the left knee," Lucy said. Then she added, "There's some sort of growth there. I don't like the look of it."

VIVIAN found a note from Mike Seddons when she finished her last class of the day and went back to the student nurses' home. It asked her to be on the hospital's third floor near Pediatrics at nine forty-five that night. At first she had not intended to go, knowing she would have no reason officially to be in the hospital and that she might be in trouble if she ran into any of the nursing supervisors. But she found herself wanting so strongly

to go that at nine forty she crossed the wooden bridge between the nurses' home and the hospital.

Mike was waiting in the corridor. As soon as he saw her he motioned to a door and they went inside. It led to an interior stair well, with a metal stairway leading up and down. At this time of night it was deserted and there would be plenty of warning of anyone's approach. Mike went down half a flight on to the next landing, leading her by the hand. Then he turned, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should go into his arms.

As they kissed she felt Mike's arms tightening and the magic of the night before came sweeping back. At this moment she knew why she had wanted so much to come here. This man with the wild red hair had suddenly become indispensable to her. It was an electric feeling she had never known before. He was kissing her cheeks now, her eyes, her ears. His face in her hair, he whispered, "Vivian darling, I've been thinking about you all day." With both hands he took her face and looked into it. "Do you know what you're doing?" She shook her head. "You're

undermining me." He kissed her again, gently. Then he said, "Vivian dearest, I want to marry you."

"Mike darling," she asked softly, "are you sure?"

The impetuosity of his own words had surprised even himself, but suddenly, deeply, Mike knew them to be true. His old fear of entanglements seemed pointless; this was an entanglement he wanted, to the exclusion of all others.

Characteristically he answered Vivian's question with a touch of humour. "Sure I'm sure. Aren't you?"

As her arms went round him Vivian murmured, "I've never been more sure of anything."

"Hey!" Mike broke away, facing her. "All this put it out of my mind. What about your knee? Tell me what Lucy Grainger said."

"She didn't. She had Dr. Bell take some X-rays this afternoon. She said she'd send for me in a couple of days."

Mike said, "I'll be glad when it's cleared up."

Vivian said, "Don't be silly, darling. How could a little bump like that be anything serious?"

Chapter 6

Dear Mr. Tomaselli:

This letter is to advise you that I have decided to accept the appointment at Three Counties on the terms we discussed, and I can begin work a week from now, 15th August.

There is one point we did not clear up entirely, and I hope that you may be able to discuss it with Dr. Pearson some time before my arrival. It is my feeling that it would be advantageous, both for the hospital and myself, if there were some clearly defined areas of responsibility (preferably Serology. Haematology and Biochemistry) where I could have a reasonably free hand, both in general supervision of the day-to-day work and also in the carrying out of any changes of organization and technique. Please be assured, however, that I will seek to co-operate fully with Dr. Pearson as well as to serve Three Counties Hospital to the best of my ability.

*Yours very truly,
David Coleman, M.D.*

David Coleman sealed the letter and wrote a similar note to Joseph Pearson. He was still not sure why he had chosen Three Counties in preference to the seven other posts he had been offered within recent weeks. In financial terms, it was more than half-way down the list. Nor was it a "name" hospital. Three Counties was scarcely known outside the immediate area it served.

Why then? Was it because of the challenge that he had made his choice? Maybe. There were certainly a lot of things wrong in Pathology at Three Counties Hospital. He had seen that in the two brief days he had spent there last week. And working with Dr. Pearson was not going to be easy. He had sensed the older man's resentment. Was it because of the challenge? Or was it something else? Was it . . . self-mortification? Was it still the same old spectre that had haunted him so long?

Coleman had long suspected pride to be the strongest trait in his character, and it was the defect he feared and hated most. He had never been able to conquer pride; he spurned it, rejected it, yet always it came back, strong and indestructible.

Mostly his pride stemmed from an awareness of his own superior intellect. Learning had proved as simple as breathing for him. At school, college, medical school, he had taken highest honours almost as a matter of course. He had a mind which was absorbent, analytical, understanding—and proud.

He had first learned about pride at high school. His brilliance was regarded initially by his fellow students with some suspicion. Then, as he made no attempt to conceal his feelings of mental superiority, suspicion turned to dislike. He had sensed this, but he had not consciously cared until one day the school principal, an understanding man, had taken him aside. "I think you're big enough to take this," he'd said, "so I'm going to spell it out. In these four walls, apart from me, you haven't a single friend. You're a brilliant scholar. You can go on to anything you choose. But I warn you: if you want to live with others, sometimes you'll have to *seem* less superior than you are."

It was a daring thing to say to a young, impressionable man. But Coleman went away with the advice; digested it, analysed it, and finished up despising himself. From then on he had worked harder than ever—to rehabilitate himself with a planned programme of self-mortification. He went in for sport, which he disliked; he went out of

his way to be cordial to those he considered intellectually inferior. At college he took on the reputation of a friendly sage. It became customary for those in academic difficulties to say, "Let's have a discussion with David Coleman. He'll straighten us out." And invariably he did.

Time and experience should have made him sympathetic with those less gifted than himself. But within himself Coleman found he still had the old contempt for mental incompetence. He concealed it, fought it with iron discipline, but it would never go away. He had gone into medicine partly because his father had been a country doctor and partly because it was something he had always wanted to do himself. But he had chosen pathology because it was generally considered the least glamorous of the specialities. It was part of his own deliberate process of beating down the inevitable pride.

At times he still found it hard to decide whether his motives came from pure choice or were from the habit of sackcloth he had worn for so long. Thus, the question to himself: Had he chosen Three Counties because it was what he really wanted, or because of the old subconscious feeling that here was where his pride would suffer most?

ELIZABETH ALEXANDER had fallen in love with John at high school, and everyone seemed to accept their marriage while John was still at college as natural and inevitable: she had worked as a shorthand-typist and supported them both. The question for them was John's future—whether he should try for medical school or settle for the shorter course of a medical technologist. Elizabeth had favoured medical school: she had been willing to continue working. But John, though he had always wanted to enter medicine, was impatient to contribute something to their marriage. Then they had discovered that Elizabeth was pregnant and, for John, it was the deciding factor. Over his wife's protests he had enrolled at medical-technology school and they had moved to Chicago.

There they had had their baby and had called her Pamela. When the child died, Elizabeth's world fell in; for all her stability and common sense, she had gone to pieces. It was not until she learned she was pregnant again, just before John's graduation, that she returned wholly to normalcy. She felt a growing excitement at the thought of the unborn child within her.

Now, on the seventh floor of the Burlington Medical Arts Building, she was dressing herself in the examining-room adjoining Dr. Dornberger's office. He had given her his usual thorough examination, and had gone back to his desk. Through the partly open door she heard him say, "Come and sit down when you're ready."

"I'll just be a minute, Doctor," she answered cheerfully.

Seated at his desk, Dornberger smiled. He liked to have patients who were obviously enjoying pregnancy, and Elizabeth Alexander was. She'll be a good no-nonsense mother, he thought. She seemed an attractive girl, not pretty in the conventional sense, but with a lively personality which more than compensated for it. He called out, "Well, I'd say you're going to have a normal, healthy baby, with no complications."

"That's what Dr. Crossan said." She came in and sat down.

Dornberger checked his notes again. "He was your doctor in Chicago, and he delivered your first child. Is that right?"

"Yes." Elizabeth opened her purse and took out a slip of paper. "I have his address here, Doctor."

"Thank you. I'll write to him for your medical history." Dornberger clipped the paper to his notes. He said matter-of-factly, "What did your first baby die of, Mrs. Alexander?"

"Bronchitis. When she was a month old." Elizabeth said it normally. A year ago she would have had to fight back tears.

Dr. Dornberger reached in a drawer of his desk. Extracting a pad of forms, he said, "We must send you to the lab. for a blood test."

As he wrote on a form, Elizabeth said, "I meant to tell you, Doctor. I'm Rh negative and my husband is Rh positive."

"Then we'll have to make it a very thorough check." He tore off the form and gave it to her. "You can take this to the outpatients department any time."

On the point of ending the interview Dornberger hesitated; it was his business to see that she had no anxieties. "Mrs. Alexander," he said, "even though you and your husband have differing Rh blood types, it doesn't mean there will necessarily be any problem with the baby. Do you understand exactly what is meant by the terms 'Rh positive' and 'Rh negative'?"

She hesitated. "Well, not exactly."

"Let me put it as simply as I can. All of us have certain factors—ingredients—in our blood, and different human beings have different blood factors. Most of us have between fifteen and twenty of them in our blood streams. What's important is to remember that some factors are compatible and some are not."

"You mean"

"I mean that, when these blood factors are mixed together, some will get along quite happily, but some will fight one another. That's why we are always careful, when we give a transfusion, to be sure it's the right kind of blood for the person receiving it."

"And it's the factors that fight each other—the incompatible ones—that cause the trouble when people have babies?"

Dornberger answered, "Occasionally they do, but more often they don't. Your husband, you say, is Rh positive. Well, that means his blood contains a factor called 'big D.' Because you're Rh negative you don't have any 'big D.' " He pointed to the bulge below her waist. "We don't know yet whether Junior here has Rh-negative blood or Rh-positive. In other words, we don't know if he has any 'big D.' "

With a trace of anxiety Elizabeth asked, "What happens if he does? Does it mean that his blood will fight with mine?"

Dornberger said calmly, "There's always that possibility. A baby's blood is always quite separate from the mother's. Nevertheless, in pregnancy, small amounts of the baby's blood often escape into the mother's blood stream. If the mother is Rh negative and the baby happens to be Rh positive, our old friend 'big D' may seep into the mother's blood stream, and he isn't welcome there. When that happens, the mother's blood usually creates something we call antibodies, and those antibodies fight the 'big D' and eventually destroy it."

Elizabeth was puzzled. "Then where's the problem?"

"There never is any problem—for the mother. The problem, if there is one, begins when the antibodies the mother has created cross over the placental barrier into the baby's blood stream. You see, although there's no regular movement of blood between mother and baby, the antibodies can, and do, cross over quite freely."

"I see," Elizabeth said slowly. "And you mean the antibodies would start fighting with the baby's blood—and destroy it?"

Dornberger said, "The antibodies might destroy the baby's blood—

or part of it—if we let them. That's a condition we call erythroblastosis foetalis. But we can combat it. As soon as there are any antibodies in the mother's blood we get a warning through a blood-sensitization test. If the test is positive, the most important thing is to give the baby an exchange transfusion of the right kind of blood immediately after birth. It's usually successful." He avoided mention of the strong danger of an erythroblastotic child being born dead or that doctors often induced labour several weeks early to give the child a better chance of life. He decided to sum up.

"Mrs. Alexander, let me remind you now of the important things. Point one: you may never have an Rh-positive baby, now or later. In that case there can't be any problem. Point two: even if your baby happens to be Rh positive, you may not become sensitized. Point three: even if your baby were to have erythroblastosis, the chances of treatment and recovery are favourable. Now—how do you feel about it all?"

Elizabeth was beaming. "Dr. Dornberger," she said, "I think you're wonderful."

Amusedly Dornberger reached for his pipe and began to fill it. "Yes," he said, "sometimes I feel that way too."

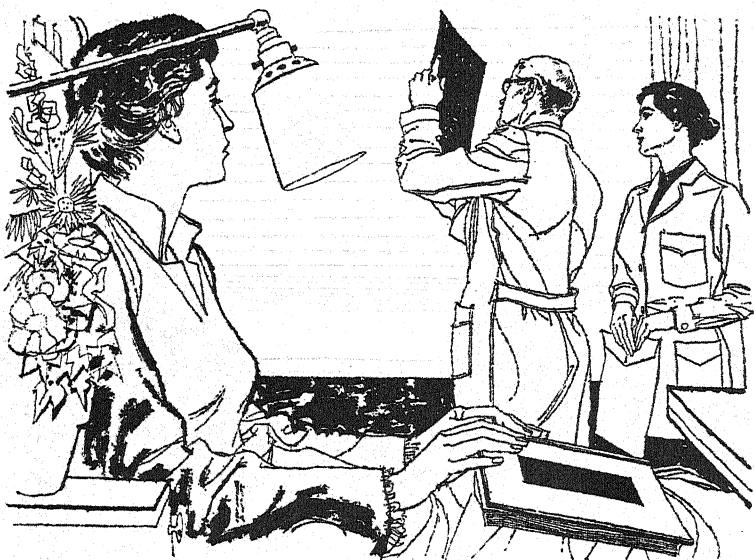
LUCY HAD been on her way to Pathology when Pearson's bulky figure loomed ahead in the main-floor corridor. As she called to him he stopped. She said: "Joe, I'd like you to see a patient of mine."

He was busy lighting one of the inevitable cigars. When he had it going he surveyed the red tip. "What's the trouble?"

"It's one of our own student nurses, Vivian Loburton. The case is worrying me a little. I suspect a bone tumour and I've a biopsy scheduled for the day after tomorrow. The tissue will be coming down to you, of course, but I thought perhaps you'd like to take a look at the girl now. She's on the first floor for observation."

Pearson nodded. "Might as well." They moved towards the main vestibule and the passenger lifts.

Lucy's request to Pearson was not unusual. In the diagnosis of any tumour where malignancy was a possibility there were many factors—sometimes conflicting—for a pathologist to weigh in balance. But determination of bone tumours was even more difficult. Consequently it was an advantage for the pathologist to be involved with a case at the



beginning. In that way he could know the patient, discuss symptoms, and hear the radiologist's opinion, all of which aided his diagnosis.

Vivian was in a semi-private room. Lucy greeted a woman in the bed nearest the door, then moved over to the second bed where Vivian looked up from a magazine.

"Vivian, this is Dr. Pearson."

"Hullo, Vivian." Pearson said it absently as he took the chart which Lucy offered him.

She answered politely, "Good afternoon, Doctor."

It was still a puzzle to Vivian why she was here at all. True, her knee had been painful again, but it seemed such a small thing to be put to bed for. However, it was a pleasant break from nursing-school routine to be reading and resting for a change.

Pearson said, "Let me see both knees, please."

Vivian turned back the bedclothes and lifted the hem of her nightgown. Pearson bent over for a close inspection.

Lucy watched the pathologist's short stubby fingers move carefully over the limbs. She thought: For someone who can be so rough with

people he's surprisingly gentle. Once Vivian winced as a finger probed. Pearson looked up. "Hurt you there, eh? I see from Dr. Grainger's report that you hit your knee about five months ago."

"Yes, Doctor. I didn't remember it until I started thinking back. I hit it on the bottom of a swimming-pool."

Pearson asked her, "Did it hurt very much at the time?"

"Yes. But then the pain went away and I didn't think any more about it, except for a twinge a month ago."

"All right, Vivian. Have you got the X-rays, Lucy?"

She produced a large Manila envelope. "There are two sets. The first set didn't show anything. Then we softened them up to see the muscles, and that showed an irregularity in the bone."

Pearson and Lucy moved to the window and the pathologist held the X-ray negatives to the light. As he studied the second one Lucy pointed. "There. You see?" They looked at it together.

"Ralph Bell confirms the irregularity," Lucy said. "But he can't see enough for a diagnosis. He agrees we should have a biopsy."

Pearson turned back to the bed. "Do you know what a biopsy is, Vivian?"

She shook her head.

"Well, Dr. Grainger will take out a small piece of tissue from the spot where the trouble seems to be. Then it will come to me and I'll study it."

Vivian asked, "And can you tell from that what's the matter?"

"Most times I can." He turned and started to leave. "All right, Vivian," he said, "that's all for now."

Lucy smiled. "I'll be back later."

She followed Pearson out; and as the door closed Vivian for the first time felt an uneasy chill of fear.

Well down the corridor Lucy asked, "What's your opinion?"

"It could be a bone tumour," Pearson said slowly, thinking.

"Malignant?"

"It's possible."

They came to the lift and stopped. Lucy said, "Of course, if it's malignant, I'll have to amputate the leg."

Pearson nodded slowly. Suddenly he looked very old. "Yes," he said. "I was thinking of that."

Chapter 7

THE PROP-JET Viscount turned evenly and began to lose height. Watching the plane approach Burlington's municipal airport, Kent O'Donnell reflected that aviation and medicine had a good deal in common. Both were changing the world, destroying old concepts, and moving towards unknown horizons and a future only dimly seen. There was another parallel; aviation too was having trouble keeping pace with its own discoveries. An aircraft designer had told him recently, "If an aeroplane's flying it's already out of date."

The practice of medicine, O'Donnell thought, was very much the same. Hospitals, clinics, doctors themselves were never entirely up to date. New techniques were always ahead of them—sometimes by years. A man might die today when the drug that could save him was already invented and even, perhaps, in limited use. It took time for new developments to gain acceptance. Heart surgery, for example, was fairly general now and within reach of most who needed it badly. But for a long time only a handful of surgeons were qualified or willing to attempt it.

The Viscount taxied in. Finding Dr. Coleman among the disembarking passengers, O'Donnell went forward to greet him. "It's good to see you," he said. "Joe Pearson couldn't make it, but we thought that someone should be around to say 'Welcome.'" O'Donnell failed to add that Joe Pearson had flatly refused to go and, Harry Tomaselli being out of town, the chief of Surgery had taken the time to drive out himself.

David Coleman had had a three-hour air journey, but his gaberdine suit was uncreased. He had clear-cut, well-defined features, steel-grey eyes and an incisive jaw. The brief-case under his arm added a professional touch; picture of a young scientist, O'Donnell thought. He steered Coleman towards the baggage counter. Ten minutes later, as O'Donnell threaded his Buick through the airport traffic and headed towards town, he said, "We've put you up at the Roosevelt Hotel. It's as comfortable as any and quiet. Perhaps you'd like to take a day or two to find an apartment before you report at the hospital."

"I don't think so, thank you. I plan to start work tomorrow morning." Coleman was polite but definite.

O'Donnell thought: This is a man who states his opinion plainly and is not easily dissuaded. He passed a trailer truck. Then he said, "I'd like to tell you a couple of things, if I may. We've had a number of changes at Three Counties these past few years. Your being here represents a major change, and I imagine that, once you're installed, there will be other changes you'll want to make yourself."

Coleman thought of the Pathology department as he had seen it during his visit. "Yes," he responded, "I'm sure there will."

O'Donnell was silent. Then, more slowly, he said, "We've tried to make our changes peaceably; but I'm not one who believes in sacrificing a principle just to keep the peace." He looked sideways at Coleman. "Let's be clear about that."

Coleman nodded but made no answer. O'Donnell went on, "All the same, wherever you can, I'd suggest you move discreetly. Do what you can by persuasion; save the big guns for things that really matter."

Non-committally Coleman said, "I see." He was not sure just what he was being told. Had he been wrong in his impression of O'Donnell? Was he, after all, just a pussyfooter? Was Coleman being told here and now, as a newcomer, not to rock the boat? If so, they would quickly find that they had the wrong man.

O'Donnell was wondering now if he had been wise in saying what he had. They had been fortunate to get Coleman, and he had no wish to put him off right at the beginning. But all the time at the back of O'Donnell's mind was the problem of Joe Pearson and his influence with Eustace Swayne. The hospital badly needed Swayne's quarter of a million and, if that meant placating Joe Pearson a little, O'Donnell was prepared to go along—within reason. But where did hospital politics end and O'Donnell's responsibility as a medical practitioner begin? It was a question that troubled him. As he stopped at Coleman's hotel he told himself that some day he might have to decide just where the line of demarcation lay.

MIKE SEDDONS, sitting alone in the house-staff lounge, was deeply troubled. Ever since he had read the chart in the sister's office near Vivian's hospital room, his worry and distress had steadily grown. Last night he had lain awake for hours, his mind turning over the full significance of the words written on the chart in Dr. Lucy Grainger's

handwriting: *Vivian Loburton—suspected osteogenic sarcoma—prepare for biopsy.*

The first time he had seen Vivian—the day of the autopsy—she was merely another pretty student nurse. Even at their second meeting—before the incident in the park—he had thought of her principally as an interesting, exciting girl. But now, for the first time in his life, Mike Seddons was deeply and genuinely in love. And tortured with a haunting, dreadful fear.

The night he had told Vivian he wanted to marry her he had had no time to think the implications over. But once the words to her were out he had known them to be true. A hundred times since he had repeated them silently, without a single thought of wanting to turn back.

Then this.

If the diagnosis of “suspected osteogenic sarcoma” were confirmed it would mean that Vivian had a virulent, malignant tumour which would spread—and perhaps already had—elsewhere in her body. In that event, without swift surgery, her chances of survival beyond a year or so were almost nil. Surgery meant amputation in the hope of containing the spreading poisonous cells before they moved too far beyond the original site. And even after amputation eighty per cent of osteogenic patients went steadily downhill.

But it didn't *have* to be osteogenic sarcoma. It could be a harmless bone tumour. Mike felt himself sweating at the thought of how much—for both himself and Vivian—was riding on the biopsy result.

Lucy Grainger would be performing the biopsy this afternoon. Mike looked at his watch. It was two thirty p.m. According to the operating-theatre schedule, they should be starting now. If Pathology worked fast the answer might be known by tomorrow. He found himself praying: *Oh, God! Please, God—let it be benign!*

IN THE serology laboratory Bannister had just picked up a tray of blood samples from the outpatients' laboratory. Half-way across the room he stopped. “Hey, there's a blood sample here from a Mrs. Alexander,” he said. “Is that your wife?”

John put down the pipette he had been using and moved across. “Probably. Dr. Dornberger sent her in for a sensitivity test.”

“It says both typing and sensitivity,” Bannister said.

"Elizabeth is Rh negative. I'm Rh positive."

Expansively, and with a fatherly air of great knowledge, Bannister said, "Oh, well, most of the time that doesn't cause any trouble."

"Yes, I know. All the same, you like to be sure."

"Well, here's the specimen." Bannister held up the test-tube labelled *Alexander, Mrs. E.* "Want to do the test yourself?"

"If you don't mind."

Bannister never objected to someone else doing work which might otherwise fall to himself. He said, "It's all right with me." Then, glancing at the clock, he added, "You can't do it tonight though. It's packing-up time." He replaced the test-tube and handed the tray to Alexander. "Better put this lot away until the morning."

Alexander took the blood samples and put them in the lab. refrigerator. Then, closing the refrigerator door, he paused thoughtfully.

"Carl, there's something I've meant to ask you. The blood-sensitization tests we're doing here—I've been wondering about them." He chose his words carefully: he realized the possibility of arousing resentment in people like Bannister because of his own college training. "I notice we're only doing two sensitization tests—one in saline, one in high protein. Isn't that a bit out of date?"

Bannister said sharply, "Suppose you tell me why."

Alexander ignored the sharpness. He said, "Most labs. nowadays are doing a third test—an indirect Coombs."

"What's that?"

"Are you kidding?" The moment the words were out Alexander knew he had made a mistake. But he hadn't realized that any serology technician could fail to know of an indirect Coombs test.

"You don't have to get smart." Bannister leaned forward aggressively, his bald head reflecting a light bulb above. "Look, fella, I'll tell you something for your own good. You're fresh from school, and one thing you haven't found out is that some things they teach you there just don't work out in practice."

"This isn't just theory, Carl." Alexander spoke earnestly. "It's been proved that some antibodies in the blood of pregnant women can't be detected in either a saline solution or high protein."

"And how often does it happen?" Bannister said smugly.

"Very seldom. But it's enough to make the third test important. It

isn't much more work. All that's needed is Coombs serum. It's true it makes the testing a little more expensive"

This was familiar ground. "Oh, yeah!" Bannister said sarcastically. "That would go great with Pearson. Anything that's more expensive is sure to be a big hit."

"But don't you understand? With the two tests we're doing you can get a negative test result, and yet a mother's blood may still be sensitized. You could kill a newborn child that way."

"Well, it isn't your job to worry about it." This was Bannister at his crudest. "Pearson isn't keen on new ways of doing things—especially when they cost more money. Look, kid, I'll give you some more advice. We're not doctors, and you'd be wise to stop trying to sound like one. We're lab. assistants and we work in here the way we're told."

"That doesn't mean I can't think, does it?" It was John's turn to be aroused. "All I know is, I'd like to see my wife's test done in Coombs serum. This baby happens to be important to us."

The older man surveyed Alexander. He could see clearly now—this kid was a troublemaker. Maybe he should be allowed to hang himself right now. Bannister said, "I've told you what I think. If you don't like it you'd better go and see Pearson. Tell him you're not satisfied with the way things are being run round here."

Alexander looked directly at the senior technician. Then he said quietly, "Maybe I will."

Chapter 8

ARRIVING AT the hospital a few minutes after eight on his first morning in Burlington, Dr. David Coleman went directly to the pathologist's office. Carl Bannister was sorting papers on Dr. Pearson's desk when Coleman knocked and entered.

Surprised, the senior laboratory technician looked up. It was unusual to have visitors this early. Most people round the hospital knew that Joe Pearson seldom arrived before ten o'clock. "Good morning," he said, not too affably. "Are you looking for Dr. Pearson?"

"In a way, yes. I'm starting work here today." Seeing the other start, he added, "I'm Dr. Coleman."

The effect was like setting off fireworks under a hen. Bannister put

down his papers hurriedly and came round the desk, almost at a run. "Oh, excuse me, Doctor. I'd heard you were coming, but we had no idea it would be this soon."

Coleman said calmly, "Dr. Pearson is expecting me. Is he in?"

Bannister seemed shocked. "You're too early for him. He won't be here for another two hours."

"I see."

As Coleman glanced round, Bannister said, "Oh, by the way, Doctor, I'm Carl Bannister—senior lab. technician." He added genially, "I expect we'll be seeing a lot of each other." Bannister made a habit of taking no chances with anybody senior to himself.

"Yes, I expect we will." Coleman was not sure how much the idea appealed to him. But he shook hands and continued to look round. Once again Bannister was alert to serve and please.

"Would you like me to show you round the labs?" he asked.

Coleman said, "I saw part of the labs with Dr. Pearson a few weeks ago. But I'll take another look if you're not too busy."

"Well, of course, we're always busy, Doctor. But I'll be glad to take the time for you." He opened the door of the serology lab. and stood back for Coleman to enter. John Alexander looked up from the centrifuge in which he had just placed a blood sample. "Doctor, this is John Alexander. He's just started work here." Bannister was warming to his role of showman. He added facetiously, "Still wet behind the ears from technology school, eh, John?"

"If you say so," Alexander answered uncomfortably, resenting the condescension but not wanting to be rude.

Coleman moved forward, offering his hand. "I'm Dr. Coleman, the new pathologist. What are you working on now?"

"It's a blood sensitization." He indicated the centrifuge. "This specimen is from my wife. She's having a baby in about two months." He balanced the centrifuge and switched it on, then reached over to set a timing dial. Coleman noticed that all the movements were economical and quick. Alexander added, "My wife is Rh negative; I'm Rh positive."

Coleman smiled. "Well, that's no problem, as long as the sensitization test shows a negative result."

Now, Alexander thought, he could bring his doubts into the open;

the new doctor certainly seemed easier to deal with than Pearson. "About the test, Doctor," he said. "I think we should be doing an indirect Coombs test on all these samples, *after* the tests in saline and high protein."

"Of course there should be an indirect Coombs. That's basic."

Alexander shot a glance at Bannister. "Doctor, there's no Coombs serum being used here at all."

Coleman asked Bannister, "Is this true?"

"The way we do all our tests is according to Dr. Pearson's instructions." The technician made it plain that in his opinion the entire discussion was a waste of time.

"Perhaps he doesn't know you're doing the Rh tests that way."

"He knows all right." This time Bannister let his surliness come through. It was always the same with new people. They weren't inside a place five minutes before they started making trouble. Well, one thing was certain—Joe Pearson would soon put this fellow in his place. Bannister just hoped he was about to see it happen.

Coleman decided to ignore the senior technician's tone. "Anyway, I'll mention it to Dr. Pearson," he said. "I'm sure he wasn't aware of it. And meanwhile let's get some Coombs serum in the lab."

"We can't just go out and get lab. supplies," Bannister said. "There has to be a purchase requisition." He wore a superior smile.

"Let me have the form then," Coleman said, still pleasantly but firmly. "I imagine I can sign it. That's one of the reasons I'm here."

Briefly the older technician hesitated. Then he opened a drawer and produced a pad of forms. Handing it over, he said pettishly, "Dr. Pearson likes to order all lab. supplies himself."

Coleman scribbled the order and signed it. With a tight, cool smile, he said, "I expect to have a good deal more responsibility here than just ordering fifteen dollars'-worth of rabbit serum. There you are." As he handed back the pad and pencil the phone rang.

Bannister, his face red with anger, answered the phone. After listening briefly he gave a curt answer and hung up. "Gotta go down to Out-patients." The words, almost mumbled, were addressed to Coleman.

He answered icily, "You can go ahead."

With the incident closed Coleman found himself more angry than he had realized. What kind of discipline existed which allowed insolence

like this from a laboratory technician? If this were the general order of things, it seemed probable that the entire Pathology department was even more run-down than he had believed at first. He took a more careful look at the rest of the lab. and saw how sloppy and disorganized the whole place was. Tables and benches were cluttered with an assortment of apparatus and supplies. He noticed a heap of dirty glassware, a pile of yellowed papers. A section of one work-table had fungus growing from it.

"It isn't very tidy, is it?" Alexander said, feeling a surge of shame that anyone should see this place the way it was.

"I'd put it a little stronger than that." Coleman was disgusted. All this must be changed, though it might have to wait a while. He would have to be cautious in his dealings with people here.

John Alexander had been watching Coleman closely. Ever since he had come in with Bannister there had been something vaguely familiar about him. Now he said, "Doctor, excuse my mentioning it, but I have a feeling we've met somewhere before. Have you ever been in Indiana? New Richmond?"

"Yes," Coleman said, startled, "I was born there."

John Alexander beamed. "I should have remembered the name, of course. Your father was Dr. Byron Coleman. I'm from New Richmond too. So is my wife."

"Really?" Coleman asked. "Did I know you there?"

"I don't think so, though I remember seeing you a couple of times." In the social life of New Richmond, John Alexander had been several stages removed from the orbit of the doctor's son. "My father was a market gardener. We lived outside town. You may remember my wife though. Her family had the hardware shop."

Coleman said thoughtfully, "Yes, I believe I do." Memory stirred. "Wasn't she in an accident of some sort?"

"That's right," Alexander said. "Her father was killed in his car at the level crossing. Elizabeth was with him."

"I was away at college then, but I remember hearing about it."

"Elizabeth almost died. But they gave her blood transfusions and she made it." Alexander paused. Then, still pleased at his discovery, "If you happen to be free one evening, Dr. Coleman, I'm sure my wife would enjoy meeting you. We have a small apartment . . ."

Coleman's brain clicked out a warning: Be cautious of alliances with subordinates—even one like this. He rationalized: It isn't snobbery; it's just a matter of hospital discipline and common sense. Aloud he said, "Well, I'm going to be working quite hard for a while. Let's leave it, shall we, and see how things go?"

Even as he spoke them the words sounded hollow and false. He thought: You could have let him down more lightly than that. Mentally he added a footnote to himself: You haven't changed, my friend; you haven't changed at all.

MOMENTARILY Harry Tomaselli found himself wishing that Mrs. Straughan would go back to her kitchens and stay there. Then he checked himself: a good chief dietitian was a pearl to be prized. And a good department head was always willing to fight and argue for something which he or she believed in. Mrs. Straughan was a fighter in every ample cubic inch of her. At this moment, her big bulk overflowing a chair in the administrator's office, she was fighting hard.

"I wonder if you realize, Mr. T., that the dishwashers I have now were obsolete at least five years ago." Mrs. Straughan always used the surname initial: she referred to her own husband as "Mr. S." "Every year I've been told: Next year we'll give you your new ones. And when the next year comes, where are my dishwashers? I find they're put off for another twelve months. It won't do, Mr. T. It just won't do."

Tomaselli prepared to cover, once more, the ground they had gone over just a week or two before. "There's no question, Mrs. Straughan, that the dishwashers are going to be replaced eventually. I know the problem you have down there in the kitchens, but those are big, expensive machines. If you remember, the last estimate we had ran a little under eleven thousand dollars, allowing for changes in the hot-water system. Just at this moment hospital money for capital expenditures is extremely tight. The building extension, of course, is partly responsible. It's simply a question of allocating priorities."

"What good is medical equipment if your patients don't have clean plates to eat their food from? Several times lately whole loads of dishes going through my machines have still been dirty when they came out. We try to check as much as we can, but when there's a rush it isn't always possible. It's the danger of infection I'm worried about, Mr. T.

There's been a lot of intestinal flu among the hospital staff lately. Of course, when that happens everyone blames the food. But it wouldn't surprise me if this was the cause of it."

"We'd need considerably more evidence to be sure of that." Harry Tomaselli's patience was beginning to wear thin. Mrs. Straughan had come to him on an exceptionally busy morning. "When did Pathology last run a bacteria test on the dishwashers?"

Hilda Straughan considered. "I could check, but I think it's about six months ago."

"We'd better get them to do another."

"Very well, Mr. T. Shall I speak to Dr. Pearson?"

"No, I'll do it." The administrator made a pencilled note. At least, he thought, I can save Joe Pearson a session like this.

MAKING HIS WAY down the stairway after lunch, David Coleman pondered over the time he had spent thus far with Dr. Pearson. Up to this moment, he decided, it had been unsatisfactory and inconclusive.

On finding Coleman waiting in his office that morning, Pearson's first remark had been, "So you really meant what you said about starting right away."

"There didn't seem much point in waiting." He had added politely, "I've been looking round the labs. I hope you don't mind."

"That's your privilege," Pearson had said with a half-growl, as if it were an invasion he did not like but had to put up with. Then, as if realizing his own ungraciousness, he had added, "Well, I guess I should welcome you." When they had shaken hands, he went on, "First thing I have to do is get some of this work cleared away." He gestured at an untidy pile of slide folders, dockets and loose memoranda on his desk. "After that maybe we can decide what you'll be doing round here."

Coleman had sat, with nothing to do but read a medical journal, while Pearson had ploughed through some of the papers. A girl had come in to take dictation, and after that he had accompanied Pearson to a gross conference, where the older man made no acknowledgment of Coleman's status as the new assistant director of the entire department. Then they had gone to lunch together, but Pearson had excused himself and left, saying there was some urgent work to attend to. Now Coleman was returning to Pathology alone.

He had anticipated some resistance from Dr. Pearson, of course. From odd bits of information which had come to him he had pieced together the fact that Pearson had not wanted a second pathologist, but he had certainly not expected anything quite like this.

He had assumed that, at the very least, there would be an office for him and a few clearly defined duties. Certainly he had not expected to take over a great number of major responsibilities at once. He had no objection to the senior pathologist checking on him for a while; in Pearson's position, he himself would take the same precaution with a newcomer. But this situation went far beyond that. Apparently, no thought whatever had been given to Coleman's duties. The idea seemed to be that he would sit about until Dr. Pearson could find enough time to hand out a few tasks. Well, if that were the case, some of the thinking would have to be changed—and soon. Coleman already had qualifications and experience which many practising pathologists would find it hard to match. He had no intention of being treated like a raw and inexperienced hand.

He entered the Pathology office to find Pearson hunched over a microscope, a slide folder open in front of him. The older man looked up. "Come and take a look at these. See what you make of them."

"What's the clinical story?" Coleman slipped the first slide under the retaining clips and adjusted the binocular eyepiece.

"It's a patient of Dr. Grainger's." Pearson consulted some notes. "The case is a nineteen-year-old girl, Vivian Loburton. Got a lump below her left knee. Persistent pain. X-rays show some bone irregularity. These slides are from the biopsy."

There were eight slides, and Coleman studied each in turn. He knew at once that this was a hairline case, as difficult as any came. At the end he said, "My opinion is 'benign.'"

"I think it's malignant," Pearson said quietly. "Osteogenic sarcoma."

Coleman studied the eight slides again, his mind ticking off the pros and cons. It was the perennial question which all pathologists had to face: was a lesion proliferating as a natural process to fill a gap in the body's defences? Or was it proliferating because it was a neoplasm and therefore malignant?

"I'm afraid I disagree with you," he told Pearson politely. "I'd still say this tissue was benign."

The older pathologist stood silent and thoughtful, plainly assessing his own opinion against that of the younger man. After a moment he said, "You'd agree there's room for doubt, I suppose."

"Yes, there is." Coleman knew there was often room for doubt in situations like this. He could understand Pearson's hesitation; the old man had the responsibility of making a final decision. But decisions like this were part of a pathologist's job—something you had to face up to and accept. Now Coleman added, "Of course, if you're right and it is osteogenic sarcoma, it means amputation."

"I know that!" It was said vehemently but without antagonism. Pearson crossed the room. Then, turning, he said fiercely, "Blast these borderline cases! I hate them every time they come up! You have to make a decision, and yet you know you may be wrong. But who else knows it? The public doesn't know. They see a pathologist on the pictures, on television! He's the man of science in the white coat. He steps up to a microscope, looks once, and then says 'benign' or 'malignant'—just like that. People think when you look into a microscope there's some sort of pattern that falls into place like building bricks. What they don't know is that some of the time we're not even close to being sure."

"Wouldn't you say that most of the time we're right?"

"All right, so we are. But what about the times we're not right? What about this case, eh? If I say it's malignant, Lucy Grainger will amputate; she won't have any choice. And if I'm wrong, a nineteen-year-old girl has lost a leg for nothing. And yet if it *is* malignant, and there's no amputation, she'll probably die within two years." He paused, then added bitterly, "Maybe she'll die anyway. Amputation doesn't always save them."

This was a facet of Pearson's make-up that Coleman had not suspected—the deep mental involvement in a particular case. There was nothing wrong in it, of course. In Pathology it was a good thing to remind yourself that a lot of the time you were dealing not merely with bits of tissue but with people's lives. Remembering that fact kept you on your toes and conscientious—provided you were careful not to allow feelings to affect scientific judgment. Trying to help the older man's thinking, he said, "If it is malignant, there isn't any time to spare. May I suggest we check some past cases with the same symptoms?"

The old man shook his head. "It would take too long."

"But surely if we checked the cross file . . ." Coleman paused.

"We haven't got one." It was said softly, and at first Coleman wondered if he had heard aright. Then, almost as if to anticipate the other's incredulity, Pearson went on, "It's something I've been meaning to set up for a long time. Just never got round to it."

Nothing that Pearson might have said could have shocked David Coleman quite so much as this. To all pathologists with whom he had worked until now, the cross file was an essential professional tool. It was a means of teaching, a supplement to a pathologist's own knowledge and experience, a detective which could assimilate clues and offer solutions. Even more, it was a storehouse of knowledge for the future, a warranty that tomorrow's hospital patients would benefit from what was learned today. To David Coleman the absence of a cross file at Three Counties could be described with only one word: criminal.

Until this moment he had curbed his natural tendency to condemn the older pathologist on the basis of what had been evident so far. The old man had, after all, been operating alone for a long time; pressure could account for the inadequate procedures in the lab. It was possible, too, that Pearson might be strong in other ways. In David Coleman's opinion good administration and good medicine usually went together. But, of the two, medicine was the more important. He knew of too many whited sepulchres where gleaming chrome and efficient paper work ranked first, with medicine coming in a poor second. He had considered it possible that the situation here might be the reverse—with administration poor and pathology good. But now he knew the truth: Dr. Joseph Pearson was incompetent.

Trying to keep the contempt out of his voice, Coleman asked, "What do you propose?"

"There's one thing I can do." Pearson picked up his desk telephone and called Bannister. He replaced the phone, and turned to Coleman. "There are two men who are experts in this field—Chollingham in Boston and Earnhart in New York."

Coleman nodded. "Yes. I've heard of their work."

"Take these slides," Pearson said, as Bannister entered. "Get two sets off tonight—air mail, special delivery, with an 'Urgent' tag. One set to Dr. Chollingham in Boston, the other to Dr. Earnhart in New

York. Get the usual covering notes typed with a copy of the case history, and ask both to wire their findings quickly."

"Okay." The slide folder under his arm, Bannister went out.

At least, Coleman reflected, the old man had handled that part of it efficiently. Getting the two expert opinions in this case was a good idea, cross file or not.

Pearson said, "We ought to get an answer within two or three days. Meanwhile I'd better talk to Lucy Grainger." He mused. "I won't tell her much. Just that there's a slight doubt and we're getting"—he looked sharply at Coleman—"some outside confirmation."

Chapter 9

VIVIAN kept very still—bewildered, uncomprehending. This thing could not be happening to her! But there was no mistake. She knew that from the expressions of Dr. Grainger and Mike Seddons. They were seated on either side of the hospital bed where Vivian sat, propped up by pillows behind her. She turned to Lucy Grainger. "When will you know . . . for sure?"

"Dr. Pearson will tell us in two days. One way or the other."

"Oh, Mike!" She reached for his hand.

He took it gently. Then she said, "I'm sorry . . . but I think . . . I'm going to cry."

As Seddons put his arms round Vivian, Lucy rose to her feet. "I'll come back later." She said to Seddons, "Make sure that Vivian is quite clear in her mind that nothing is definite. It's just that I want her to be prepared . . . in case."

Yesterday afternoon, when Joe Pearson had reported to her by telephone, Lucy had been undecided whether to tell Vivian at this stage what the possibilities were or to wait until later. If she waited, and Pathology's report on the biopsy was "benign," Vivian would never know of the shadow which, for a while, had drifted darkly over her. But on the other hand, if, two days from now, the Pathology report said "malignant," the shock, suddenly thrust upon a young girl who had not suspected that anything serious was wrong, could be tremendous. It might be days before Vivian was ready mentally to accept major surgery—days they could ill afford to lose. So Lucy had broken the news—with

all its tragic possibilities—as gently as she could. Now she must apprise the girl's parents of the situation. Vivian was a minor; under state law their consent was required before an amputation could be performed. If the parents did not plan to fly East immediately from Oregon, she must do her best to persuade them to telegraph the authority. In her office, Lucy picked up the phone and said: "I want a long-distance call, please. It's a personal call—Salem, Oregon."

KENT O'DONNELL was heading briskly for his own office in the hospital. He had a full schedule ahead. In half an hour he was due on the operating floor; later there was a meeting of the medical executive committee, and after that he had several patients to see in town, a programme which would take him well into the evening.

As he walked he found himself thinking once more of Lucy Grainger. He wondered why he had thought so much about Lucy lately—or any woman for that matter. He smiled inwardly. Perhaps it was because the early forties were traditionally a restive time for men.

From Lucy his thoughts switched to Denise Quantz. Since the invitation she had given him the night they had met, O'Donnell had confirmed his attendance at a surgeons' congress in New York. It occurred to him that, if he were to meet Denise, he had better make the arrangements.

In his office he put in a call to her in New York, but a voice informed him that Mrs. Quantz was in Burlington. He looked up "Swayne, Eustace R." in the Burlington phone directory and dialled again. When the butler answered, he said, "I'd like to speak to Mrs. Quantz."

"One moment, please."

There was a pause. Then, "This is Mrs. Quantz."

Until this moment O'Donnell had forgotten how much her husky, soft voice had attracted him before. "I wonder if you remember," he said. "This is Kent O'Donnell."

"Of course! Dr. O'Donnell, how nice to hear from you!"

He had a vision of her beside the phone, the soft dark hair tumbled about her shoulders. He said, "I just called you in New York to ask you to have dinner with me there."

"You can still ask me." The reply was prompt and definite. "I'll be back there next week."

On impulse he said, "Do you have a free evening in Burlington?"

"Tonight is the only one. Oh, wait! I'd forgotten. Dr. Pearson is having dinner with my father; I think I ought to stay." She paused. "Unless you'd care to join us?"

Mentally he chuckled. Joe Pearson might be surprised to find him there. Instinct, though, told him it was not a good idea. He said, "Thank you, but I think perhaps we'd better postpone it."

"Oh dear." Her voice sounded disappointed; then she brightened. "I could meet you after dinner, if you like, about nine thirty. Father and Dr. Pearson are sure to get into a chess game, and when they do that anyone else might just as well not be there."

"That would be wonderful," he said. "Shall I call for you?"

"It would save time if we met in town. You tell me where."

"The Regency Room?"

"All right. At half past nine."

O'Donnell replaced the phone with a pleasant sense of anticipation. Then he glanced at the clock again. He would have to hurry to be in the operating-theatre on time.

THE MUSIC stopped, and the couples on the dance floor began drifting back to their tables.

"Tell me what you're thinking," Denise said. She smiled at O'Donnell across the table.

"I'm thinking how pleasant it would be to do this again."

She raised her glass. "To more thoughts of the same kind."

"I'll drink to that." He finished his own whisky and soda. "Shall we dance?" The music had begun again.

"I'd love to." She rose, and he followed her to the small dance floor. He held her close, and he could feel her body—tall, willowy—moving obediently, anticipating the music. Once her hair brushed lightly against his face; it brought with it a breath of perfume.

He asked, "Do you come to Burlington often?"

"Only occasionally, to see my father," she answered. "Frankly it's a city I dislike. I think I'm a New Yorker by instinct. My husband lives there and after we separated I found I didn't want to leave." She mentioned her marriage easily and unself-consciously. "There's no other city quite like it."

"I suppose that's true," he said, thinking again how beautiful this woman was. She had a composure, a lack of artifice, that younger women could rarely attain. To Kent O'Donnell, holding her now, she seemed infinitely desirable.

With a modest crescendo the orchestra stopped playing. Back at the table, Denise said, "Now tell me about you."

"It's pretty routine," he said. He told her about Three Counties, his work there, and what he hoped to do. She asked him questions about his experiences, admiring the depth of thought and feeling which came through everything he said.

They danced again; the waiter replaced their drinks. Denise told him about her marriage; it had taken place eighteen years ago, had lasted ten. Her husband was a corporation lawyer with a busy practice in New York. There were two children—twins. In a few weeks they would be seventeen. "In some ways Geoffrey is delightful," she said. "But we were quite incompatible and wasted a lot of time coming to an obvious conclusion."

"Is there some barrier to divorce?" O'Donnell asked her.

"Not really," she said. "Geoffrey is quite willing to divorce me but insists that I supply the evidence. In the State of New York, you know, it has to be adultery."

The waiter was at the table. "Excuse me, sir, the bar is closing in a few minutes. Do you wish to order now?"

Surprised, O'Donnell glanced at his watch. It was almost one o'clock in the morning; they had been together for three and a half hours. He glanced at Denise; she shook her head, and they rose to go.

In the foyer Denise took his arm. "It's such a shame to go. I almost wish we'd had that last drink after all."

He hesitated, then said lightly, "We could stop at my apartment if you like. It's on the way."

For an instant he thought he detected a sudden coolness. Then it was gone. She said simply, "Why don't we do that?"

At the apartment he mixed drinks, took them across and gave one to Denise. She was standing by an open window in the living-room, looking out at the lights of Burlington below. Standing beside her, he said quietly, "I hope it's the way you like it."

She sipped from the glass. Then softly, huskily, "Like so much else

about you, Kent, it's absolutely right." Their eyes met and he reached out for her glass. When he had put it down she came gently, effortlessly, to him. As they kissed, his arms tightened round her.

Then stridently, imperiously, in the room behind them a phone clamoured. There was no ignoring it.

Gently Denise disengaged herself. "Darling, I think you'd better answer it." She touched his forehead with her lips.

As he crossed the room he saw her gather up her purse, stole and gloves. It was obvious the evening was over. Almost angrily he picked up the phone, answered curtly and listened. Then the anger dissolved. It was the hospital. One of O'Donnell's patients had developed symptoms which appeared to be serious. He asked two swift questions, then, "Very well, I'll come at once. Meanwhile, alert the blood bank and prepare for a transfusion." He broke the connection, then called the night porter to get a taxi for Denise.

MOST NIGHTS of the week Joseph Pearson went to bed early; but on the evenings he played chess with Eustace Swayne he was up much later—an occurrence which left him tired and more irritable than usual next morning. This effect was with him now.

Working his way through purchase requisitions for laboratory supplies—a task he detested—he scowled and snorted. Then, explosively, he threw his pencil down, grabbed up all the papers in an untidy heap and stormed into the serology lab. "Drop whatever you're doing and come over here!" he snapped at Bannister.

"What's the trouble?" Bannister said calmly. He was used to these outbursts.

"It's these purchase orders! Sometimes you seem to think we're running the Mayo Clinic. Why do we want Coombs serum all of a sudden? Who ordered that?"

"It was Dr. Coleman." Bannister answered readily; this was a subject he had hoped would come up. Beside him John Alexander had a sense of foreboding.

"What does he want it for? Do you know?"

"Go ahead," Bannister said to Alexander. "Tell him."

Uneasily Alexander said, "It's for a blood-sensitization test, Dr. Pearson. For my wife. Dr. Dornberger ordered it."

"Tell me—is there something special about your wife?" Pearson's voice had an edge of sarcasm. "What's wrong with the saline and high-protein tests, the same as we use for everybody else?"

Alexander swallowed nervously, then blurted out, "I suggested to Dr. Coleman—and he agreed—it would be more reliable, if, after the other tests, we did a Coombs. Since some antibodies can't be detected in saline and high protein, running the extra test——"

Pearson slammed his hand on the table and glared at Alexander. He said grimly, "There's one big trouble with you—you're just a bit too free with some of that stuff you picked up at technicians' school." As Pearson spoke his bitterness came through—the bitterness against all who were younger, who were interfering, trying to deprive him of authority. "Listen to me and get this straight! I'm in charge of this department, and if you have any queries, you come to me. Understand? Don't go running round behind my back, taking advantage of Dr. Coleman because he's new."

Briefly Alexander's spirit flared. "I didn't take advantage"

"I say you did! And I'm telling you to cut it out!" For a moment or two Pearson surveyed the younger man grimly. Then, as if satisfied that his point was made, he went on, less harshly. "Now I'll tell you something else. As far as that blood test is concerned, a test in saline and high protein will give us all the information we need. And let me remind you I happen to be a pathologist and I know what I'm talking about. Have you got that?"

Dully Alexander answered, "Yes, sir."

"All right. I'll tell you what I'll do." Pearson's voice became more moderate. "Since you're so keen on this test being right, I'll do it myself. Here and now. Get the blood specimen."

While Alexander was getting the specimen out of the refrigerator, Bannister asked Pearson, "What shall I do with this purchase requisition for Coombs serum?"

"Tear it up." Pearson was scrutinizing the label of a small bottle containing Rh-positive cells which were used as a reagent in testing Rh-negative blood.

Bannister hesitated. Much as he objected to Coleman, he knew there was a question of medical protocol involved. "You ought to let Dr. Coleman know," he said doubtfully. "Do you want me to tell him?"

Pearson was having trouble with the cork of the bottle. He said impatiently, "No. I'll tell him myself."

Chapter 10

ELIZABETH ALEXANDER was feeling good. About to begin lunch in the hospital cafeteria with her husband, she realized she had been feeling that way for days, but especially so this morning. The child inside her was alive and stirring; even at this moment she could detect its movements faintly.

It was the first time she had had a meal with John at the hospital. A few minutes earlier, on the way to lunch, John had felt defeated and depressed, Pearson's tongue-lashing still fresh in his mind. But Elizabeth's infectious spirits had caused him to shrug it off. Besides, Dr. Pearson had now done the sensitization tests himself and had announced: "So far as your wife's blood is concerned, there is nothing for anyone to worry about." After all, Dr. Pearson was a pathologist with much more experience than Dr. Coleman. From now on, John reflected, he intended to watch his step carefully in the lab.

Glancing up from his soup, John noticed Dr. Coleman on his way to the tables where the medical staff usually sat. On impulse Alexander rose. "Dr. Coleman! I'd like you to meet my wife." Then as Coleman came towards them, "Elizabeth, honey, this is Dr. Coleman. You remember—I told you he came from New Richmond too."

"Yes, of course," Elizabeth said. "Hullo, Dr. Coleman—I remember you very well. Didn't you used to come into my father's shop sometimes?"

"That's right." He recalled her clearly now: a cheerful, long-legged girl who used to clamber obligingly about that cluttered, old-fashioned shop, finding things that had got lost in the confusion.

John had pulled back a chair. "Won't you join us, Doctor?"

For a moment Coleman hesitated. Then, realizing it would be churlish to refuse, "All right," he said—and sat down. Looking at Elizabeth, he said, "I remember you used to have pigtails."

"Yes," she answered promptly, "and bands on my teeth as well."

David Coleman found himself liking this girl. "Tell me," he said, "how do you like being married to a medical man?"

Swiftly John put in, "Not a medical man—just a technologist."

"Don't undersell technology," Coleman said.

Elizabeth said, "He doesn't. But sometimes he wishes he had become a doctor instead."

Coleman turned to him. "Why didn't you go to medical school?"

"The usual reasons—money mostly."

"You could still do it," Coleman said. "How old are you?"

Elizabeth answered for him. "John is almost twenty-three."

"That's pretty old, of course." They laughed. Then Coleman added, "You've still got time."

"Oh, I know," John said. "The trouble is, it would mean a big financial struggle just when we're beginning to get settled. And besides, with a baby coming . . ."

Coleman said, "Plenty of people have gone through medical school with a baby. And financial problems."

"That's exactly what



I've been saying!" Elizabeth leaned across the table. "I'm so glad to hear it from someone else."

Coleman finished his Spartan lunch—a small fruit salad. He said, "You know what I think, John? I think if you feel like this, and don't go to medical school while you have the chance, it may be something you'll regret the rest of your life."

Elizabeth asked, "There's still a need for a lot of doctors in pathology, isn't there?"

"Perhaps more in pathology than anywhere else. We need research for one thing—to keep medicine moving ahead; to fill in the gaps behind. In a way medicine is like a war. Sometimes there's a spectacular advance. When that happens, doctors rush to the new front. And they leave a lot of pockets of knowledge to be filled in behind."

Elizabeth said, "And that's the pathologist's job—to fill them?"

"It's the job of every branch of medicine. But sometimes in pathology there are more opportunities." Coleman thought a moment. "Medical research is like building a wall. Someone adds a piece of knowledge—puts one brick on another; someone else adds one more, and gradually the wall grows. Finally someone comes along and puts the last brick on top." He smiled. "It isn't given to many to be a Fleming or a Salk. The best a pathologist can do, usually, is to make some modest contribution to medical knowledge—something within his own reach. But at least he should do that." He stopped abruptly. "Mrs. Alexander, is something wrong?"

Elizabeth had gasped suddenly and put her face in her hands. She shook her head, as if to clear it. "It's . . . it's all right. It was just . . . for a moment—a pain, then dizziness. It's gone now."

She drank some water. Yes, it was true it had gone. But for a moment it had been like sharp hot needles—inside where the baby moved—then her head swimming, the cafeteria spinning round her.

"Has this happened before?" Coleman asked.

She shook her head. "No."

"Are you sure, honey?" It was John, his voice anxious.

Elizabeth reached across the table and put a hand on his. "Now don't begin worrying. It's too early for the baby."

"All the same," Coleman said, "I suggest you call your obstetrician and tell him what happened. He might want to see you."

"I will." She gave him a warm smile. "I promise."

At the time Elizabeth meant what she said. But afterwards, away from the hospital, it seemed silly to bother Dr. Dornberger about a single pain that had come and gone so quickly. If it happened again, then would be the time to tell him—not now. She decided to wait.

"Is THERE any news?" From the wheel-chair Vivian looked up as Dr. Grainger came into the room. It was four days since the biopsy, three since Pearson had sent the slides to New York and Boston.

Lucy shook her head. "I'll tell you just as soon as I know."

She did not want to reveal that she, too, was troubled. She had spoken to Pearson again last night; he had said that if the second opinions were not forthcoming by noon today he would phone the consultants to hurry them along. Waiting was hard on everyone—including Vivian's parents, who had arrived the previous day.

Lucy removed the dressing from Vivian's knee; the biopsy scar appeared to be healing well. Replacing the dressing, she said, "It's hard, I know, but try to think of other things as much as you can."

The girl smiled faintly. "It isn't easy."

Lucy was at the door now. She said, "Perhaps a visitor will help." She beckoned to someone. "You have an early one."

Mike Seddons was wearing his hospital whites. He said, "I stole ten minutes. You can have them all."

He crossed to the chair and kissed her. For a moment she closed her eyes and held on to him tightly. "Oh, Mike, if only I knew what was going to happen! I don't think I'd mind so much. . . ."

He drew slightly away, looking into her face. "Vivian darling, I wish there were something, just something I could do."

"You've done a lot already." Vivian was smiling now. "Just being you—and being here. I don't know what it would have been like without" She stopped as he put a finger across her lips.

"Don't say it! I had to be here. It was preordained—all worked out by cosmic coincidence." He gave her his bright, broad grin. Only he knew how hollow it was. Mike Seddons, like Lucy, was aware of the implications of the delayed report from Pathology.

Vivian said, "Oh, Mike, I do love you very much."

"I can understand that." He kissed her again, lightly. "I think your

mother likes me too. I went back with your parents to the hotel last night. We sat and talked for a bit. Your mother didn't say much, but I could see your father summing me up, thinking to himself: What kind of a man is this who presumes to marry my beautiful daughter?"

Vivian said, "I'll tell him today." She reached out and held Seddons by the ears, turning his head from side to side, inspecting it. "I'll say, 'He has red hair which is always untidy, but you can put your fingers through it and it's very soft.'" She matched the action to her words.

"Well, that should be a big help. What else?"

"I'll say, 'Of course, he isn't much to look at. But he has a heart of gold and he's going to be a brilliant surgeon.'"

Seddons frowned. "Couldn't you make it 'exceptionally brilliant?'"

"I might, if . . ."

"If what?"

"If you kiss me again—now."

BACK IN THE autopsy-room—now in charge of Dr. Coleman, on Pearson's orders—Mike felt himself seized by a cheerful conviction that everything would turn out well. He was assisting with the autopsy of an elderly woman, but the feeling prompted him to tell a humorous story. Pausing, he asked McNeil, "Have you any cigarettes?"

The pathology resident motioned with his head, and Seddons crossed the room, found the cigarettes in McNeil's suit jacket, and lighted one. Returning, he finished the story, and McNeil laughed aloud. He was still laughing as the autopsy-room door opened and David Coleman stepped inside. "Dr. Seddons, will you put out that cigarette, please?" Coleman's voice cut quietly across the room.

Mike said amiably, "Oh, good morning, Doctor. Didn't see you there for a minute."

"The cigarette, Dr. Seddons!" There was ice in Coleman's tone.

Not quite understanding, Seddons said, "Oh—oh yes." He moved his hand towards the autopsy table. "Not there!" Coleman rapped out the words. Seddons found an ash-tray, and deposited the cigarette.

"Dr. McNeil. Will you drape the face, please? And the genitals."

Seddons brought over two towels and McNeil placed them carefully. Then the two residents stood facing Coleman. Both showed traces of embarrassment.

"Gentlemen, there is something I should remind you of," said Coleman. "When we perform an autopsy we do so with permission from the family of the deceased. Our own objective is to advance medical learning. The family, for its part, gives us the body in trust, expecting that it will be treated with care, respect and dignity. And that is the way we *will* treat it, gentlemen. As for your own demeanour, and particularly the use of humour"—at the word Mike Seddons flushed a deep red—"I leave that to your imagination. Will you carry on, please?" He nodded and went out.

For several seconds after the door had closed neither spoke. Then Seddons observed, "We appear to have been skilfully taken apart."

Ruefully McNeil said, "With some reason, I think. Don't you?"

AS SOON AS they could afford it, Elizabeth Alexander decided, she would buy a vacuum cleaner to take the place of the old-fashioned carpet sweeper she was using now. The trouble was, though, there were so many other things they needed. It was a problem, deciding which should come first.

In a way, she supposed, John was right. It was all very well to talk of sacrificing and doing without things so that John could go to medical school. But it was hard to manage on a reduced income once you became used to a certain standard. John's hospital salary certainly did not put them in the big brackets, but it had made their life comfortable and they were able to enjoy a few small luxuries. Medical school would mean another four years of struggling, and after that there would be housemanship and perhaps residency, if John decided to specialize. Would it be worth it?

Elizabeth put the sweeper away and began to move about the apartment, tidying and dusting. She had stopped to rearrange a vase of flowers when the pain struck her. It came without warning, like a blazing, searing fire, and worse, much worse, than the day before in the cafeteria. Drawing in her breath, biting her lip, trying not to scream, Elizabeth sank into a chair. Briefly the pain went away, then it returned, even more intensely, as if it were a cycle. Then the significance dawned upon her. Involuntarily she said, "Oh no! No!" Grasping the table for support, she eased out of the chair and moved towards the phone. When she had dialled and a voice answered, she gasped,

"Dr. Dornberger . . . it's urgent. It's . . . Mrs. Alexander. I've started . . . to have my baby."

DAVID COLEMAN was with Dr. Pearson in his office when a girl secretary came in. She said, "Excuse me, Dr. Pearson. Here are two telegrams for you." Pearson took the two envelopes and, when the girl had gone, began to thumb open the first one. He said, "These will be the answers about Lucy Grainger's patient." He added, "They took long enough about it." As Pearson had the first flap open the telephone jangled sharply. With an exclamation of annoyance he put the two envelopes down to answer it. "Yes?"

"Joe, this is Dornberger," said an urgent voice. "What's wrong with you people in Pathology? Your technician's wife—Mrs. Alexander—is in labour and the baby will be premature. She's on the way here in an ambulance, and I haven't got a blood-sensitivity report. Now get it up here fast!"

"Right, Charlie." Pearson slammed the receiver down and reached for a pile of forms in a tray marked "Signature." As he did, the two telegraph envelopes caught his eye. Quickly he passed them to Coleman. "Take these. See what they say."

Pearson removed a form and scribbled a signature on it. He lifted the telephone and said brusquely, "Send Bannister in."

"You want me?" Bannister said poking his head round the door.

"Get this form up to Dr. Dornberger—fast." He turned back to Coleman. "Well, does the girl lose her leg or not?"

Burdened with the awesome significance of the two telegrams he held, Coleman thought: This is where pathology begins and ends; these are the borderlands where we must face the truth of how little we really know. He said quietly, "Dr. Chollingham in Boston says, 'Specimen definitely malignant.' Dr. Earnhart in New York says, 'The tissue is benign. No sign of malignancy.'"

There was a silence. Then Pearson said softly, "The two best men in the country, and one votes 'for,' the other 'against.'" He looked at Coleman, and when he spoke there was irony in his voice. "Well, my young pathologist friend, Lucy Grainger expects an answer today. She will have to be given one, and it will have to be definite." With a twisted smile: "Do you feel like playing God?"

Chapter 11

A POLICEMAN on duty at Main and Liberty heard the ambulance's siren six blocks away and began to expedite the traffic flow so as to leave the intersection clear. Then, signalling a halt to all traffic on the side roads, he waved the ambulance driver past a red light.

Inside the ambulance, Elizabeth was only dimly conscious of their progress through the busy city streets. "Hold my wrists! And hang on all you want. We'll be there soon." It was the ambulance attendant. "Don't worry. Just you hold on all you want." Then the pain again, worse than before, the intervals between growing shorter. She screamed.

"Can you feel the baby coming?" It was the attendant again; he had waited until the last pain subsided, then leaned close.

She managed to nod her head and gasp. "I . . . I think so."

"All right." He eased his hands gently away. "Hang on to this for a minute." He gave her a towel he had rolled tight, then turned back the blanket over the stretcher and began to loosen her clothing. He talked softly while he worked. "We'll do the best we can if we have to. It wouldn't be the first one I've delivered in here." Turning his head, he called forward, "How are we doing, Joe?"

"Just went through Main and Liberty." A swing to the left, then the driver leaned back. "You a godfather yet?"

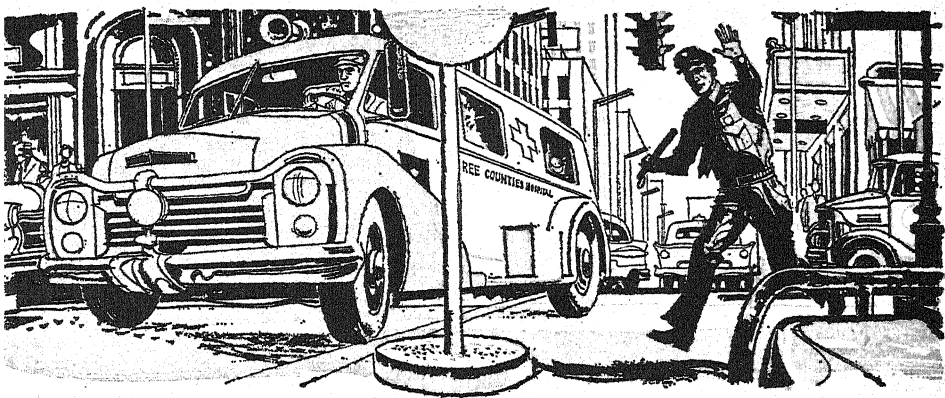
"Not quite, Joe. It's getting pretty close though."

Again the wheel spinning; a sharp turn to the right. "We're on the home stretch, boy. Just a minute more."

All Elizabeth could think, through the anguish that engulfed her, was: My baby—he'll be born too soon! He'll die! Oh God, don't let him die! Not this time! Not again!

IN OBSTETRICS, Dr. Dornberger was scrubbed and gowned. Mrs. Yeo, the head nurse, came towards him, holding a clip board so he could read it without touching it. "Here's the blood-sensitivity report on your patient, Dr. Dornberger. It just came in from Pathology."

"About time!" Unusual for him, it was almost a growl. Scanning the form, he said, "Sensitivity negative, eh? Well, there's no problem there. Is everything else ready? How about an incubator?"



"It's here now."

As Dornberger glanced round, a nurse held the outer doorway wide while a woman orderly wheeled in an incubator.

"In number two, please," Mrs. Yeo told her.

The orderly nodded and wheeled the incubator through a second swing-door immediately ahead. As it closed behind her a girl clerk came towards them from the nursing office.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Yeo. Reception just phoned." The girl turned to Dornberger. "Your patient has just arrived, Doctor, and she's on the way up. They say she's well advanced in labour."

AS IF THERE were a hope that he had misread them earlier, Dr. Pearson picked up the two telegrams again. Looking at them, he put them down one at a time. "*Malignant! Benign!* And no doubt in either one. We're back where we started."

"Not quite," Coleman said quietly. "We've lost three days."

"I know! I know!" Joe Pearson was beating a bulky fist into his palm, uncertainty about him like a mantle.

Despite his feeling about Pearson, Coleman felt his sympathy for the old man grow. He did have the final responsibility, and the decision was extremely tough. Coleman said thoughtfully, "You know, there's one other thing that might give us a better pointer."

"What?" Pearson raised his head abruptly.

"That X-ray. It was taken two weeks ago. If there *is* a tumour, and it's developing, another X-ray might show it."

Without a word Pearson picked up the telephone. He said, "Get me Dr. Bell in Radiology." Waiting, the old man eyed Coleman strangely. Then, covering the mouthpiece, he said with grudging admiration, "I'll say this for you: you're thinking—all the time."

IN THE ROOM which the hospital staff referred to as "the expectant father's sweatbox" John Alexander glanced at his watch again. He wished he had seen Elizabeth before she had gone into the delivery-room, but everything had happened so quickly that there had not been time. When Carl Bannister came to bring him the news, he was in the hospital kitchens, on Dr. Pearson's instructions, taking cultures from plates which had passed through the dishwashers. He had gone to Reception, hoping to intercept Elizabeth there, but she had already gone upstairs to Obstetrics.

At last the door opened, and Dr. Dornberger came in. John tried to read the news from his face, but without success.

"Your wife is going to be all right." Dornberger knew better than to waste time on preliminaries.

John's first impression was of overwhelming relief. Then he asked, "The baby?"

Dornberger said quietly, "You have a boy. He was premature, of course, and I have to tell you, John—he's very frail. The chances that he'll live are not as good as if he had gone to full term." John nodded dully. There seemed nothing to say, nothing that would matter now.

In the same quiet, careful tone the older man said, "As near as I can tell, you have a thirty-two-week baby; that means he was born eight weeks early." Compassionately he added, "He wasn't ready for the world, John; none of us are that soon."

"No, I suppose not." John was scarcely conscious of speaking.

"Your baby's birth weight was three pounds eight ounces. Nowadays we consider any baby less than five pounds eight ounces to be premature. We have him in an incubator, of course."

John looked at the obstetrician directly. "Then there *is* hope."

"There's always hope, son," Dornberger said quietly. "When we haven't much else, I guess there's always hope."

IN THE developing-room of Radiology, the Venetian blinds lowered to cut off the outside light, Dr. Bell and Dr. Lucy Grainger were waiting. In a few minutes the X-ray films would be ready for comparison with those of two weeks before. The technician had already fed his negatives into the auto-developing machine, and at this moment, looking somewhat like an oil furnace, its interior was humming. Now, one by one, the developed films began to fall into a slot at the front of the machine. As each film appeared Bell placed it under the clip of a viewing box, lighted from behind by fluorescent tubes. He had already put the earlier films in position on a second viewing box, immediately above. Bell was studying the negatives intently, comparing the corresponding areas in the two sets of films. He used a pencil to point so that Lucy could follow him.

When they had gone over both sets completely, Lucy asked, "Can you see any difference? I can't, I'm afraid."

The radiologist shook his head. "There's a little periosteal reaction here." He pointed with the pencil to a slight difference in grey shading at two points. "But that's probably the result of your own biopsy. Otherwise there's been no conclusive change." He said, almost apologetically, "I'm sorry, Lucy; I guess I have to throw the ball back at Pathology. Will you tell Joe Pearson, or shall I?" He began to take down the two sets of films. "I'll tell him," Lucy said. "I'll go and tell him now."

STAFF NURSE Wilding walked briskly down the Obstetrics corridor a little ahead of John Alexander. At the fifth door they came to she looked inside and announced cheerfully, "A visitor for you, Mrs. Alexander."

"Johnny darling!" Elizabeth held out her arms, and he went to her, kissing her tenderly. For a moment she held him tightly, then gently she drew back. "I must look a mess."

"You look beautiful," he told her.

"There wasn't time to bring even a nightgown or a lipstick."

He said sympathetically, "I know."

Elizabeth's expression was strained, her eyes searching. "Johnny dear, I want to know. What are the baby's chances? I want the truth." Her voice wavered and tears were not far distant.

He answered softly, "It could go either way. I saw Dr. Dornberger.

He said the chances are just fair. The baby might live, or . . .” John stopped, the sentence unfinished.

Elizabeth let her head fall back into the pillows behind her. “There really isn’t much hope, is there?”

John weighed the impact of what he might say next. Perhaps, if the baby were going to die, it was better for them both to face it now. Gently he said, “He’s . . . awfully small, you see. He was born two months too soon. If there’s any kind of infection . . . even the smallest thing He doesn’t have much strength.”

Elizabeth was quite still, not looking at him, but holding his hands tightly. There were tears on her cheeks, and John found his own eyes moist. Trying to keep his voice even, he said, “Elizabeth darling . . . whatever happens . . . we’re still young. We’ve a lot ahead of us. We’ve still got each other.”

She sobbed quietly for a moment, then murmured, “Handkerchief,” and, taking one from his pocket, he passed it to her. “I’m all right now.” She was wiping her eyes. “It’s just . . . sometimes.”

“If it helps, honey—you cry. Any time you want.”

She returned the handkerchief. “Johnny . . . lying here, I’ve been thinking I want you to go to medical school.”

He protested gently. “Now, honey, we’ve been over all this. . . .”

“No.” Elizabeth’s voice was weak, but it had an edge of determination. “I’ve always wanted you to, and now Dr. Coleman says you should.”

“Do you have any idea what it would cost?”

“Yes, I do. But I can get a job.”

Gently he said, “With a baby?”

There was a moment’s silence. Then Elizabeth said softly, “We may not have a baby.”

Nurse Wilding came into the room. She glanced at Elizabeth’s red-rimmed eyes, then discreetly avoided them. To John she said, “If you like, Mr. Alexander, I’ll take you to see your baby now.”

LIKE EVERYONE who approached the premature nursery, Nurse Wilding and John Alexander put on sterile gowns and face masks, even though plate glass separated them from the air-conditioned, humidity-controlled interior. Now, as they stopped, Mrs. Wilding leaned forward

and tapped lightly on the glass. A younger nurse inside looked up and moved towards them, her eyes inquiring above the mask.

"Baby Alexander!" Wilding raised her voice enough to carry to the other nurse, then pointed to John. The girl inside nodded and pointed to one of the incubators and turned it slightly so they could see inside.

"My God! Is that *all*?" The exclamation was torn from John even as it framed itself in his mind. "I've never seen anything so . . . so incredibly small."

The baby lay perfectly still, its eyes closed, only a slight regular movement of the tiny chest testifying to its breathing. It seemed incredible that in such fragility life could exist at all.

The younger nurse came out to join them. "Do you understand what's happening, Mr. Alexander—how your baby is being cared for?"

He shook his head. He found it hard to tear his eyes away from the tiny child, little larger than his own two hands.

The nurse pointed to the incubator. "The temperature inside is always ninety-eight degrees. About forty per cent oxygen is added to the air to make it easier for the baby to breathe. You see, his lungs weren't really developed when he was born."

"Yes. I understand." His eyes were back on the faint pulsing movement in the chest. While it continued it meant that the tiny burdened heart was beating, the thread of survival still unbroken.

The nurse went on. "Your baby isn't strong enough to suck, so we use intubation." She pointed to a plastic cord with a hollow centre which ran from the top of the incubator into the infant's mouth. "That tube goes directly into the stomach. He'll be having dextrose and water through the tube every hour and a half."

John asked, "You've seen a lot of these cases?"

"Yes." The nurse nodded gravely, as if sensing the question which would follow. She was surprisingly young, but she carried an air of professional competence.

"Do you think he'll live?" He glanced down again through the panelled glass.

"You can never tell." Her forehead creased in a frown. He could sense that she was trying to be honest, not to destroy his hopes and yet not to raise them. "Some do; some don't. It seems as if some babies have a will to live. They fight for life."

He asked her, "This one—is he fighting?"

She said carefully, "It's too early to know. But those extra eight weeks would have made a lot of difference." She added quietly, "This will be a hard fight."

Suddenly he was consumed by a sense of overwhelming love for the fragile morsel, fighting his lonely battle inside the warm little box below. He had an absurd impulse to shout through the glass: *You're not alone, son; I've come to help. These are my hands; take them for your strength. Here are my lungs; use them and let me breathe for you. Only don't give up, son; don't give up! There's so much ahead, so much we can do together—if only you'll live! Listen to me, and hold on! This is your father and I love you.*

Uncontrolled, his tears poured out. He felt Nurse Wilding's hand on his arm. Her voice said gently, "We'd better go now." He nodded, unable to speak. Then with a last glance backward they moved away.

JOE PEARSON was behind his desk in the Pathology office, David Coleman on the far side of the room, studying a file, when Lucy Grainger entered.

"I have the new X-rays on Vivian Loburton," she said.

"What do they show?" Pearson pushed some papers aside and got up.

"Very little, I'm afraid." Lucy and the two men moved to the X-ray viewer which hung on the office wall. She snapped a switch; after a second or two the fluorescent lights in the viewer flickered on. They studied the films two at a time.

At the end Pearson thoughtfully rubbed his chin with thumb and forefinger. Glancing at Coleman, he said, "It was worth trying anyway." Coleman guessed Pearson was talking to gain time and to cover up his indecision. The old man turned to Lucy. Almost sardonically, he said, "So Radiology bows out and it leaves it up to me—to Pathology?"

"Yes, Joe," she said quietly, waiting.

There was a ten-second silence before Pearson spoke again. Then he said clearly and confidently, "My diagnosis is that your patient has a malignant tumour—osteogenic sarcoma. I've been sure from the beginning. I thought this"—he indicated the X-ray films—"would give some extra confirmation." He added matter-of-factly, "When will you amputate?"

"Tomorrow morning, I expect." Lucy gathered up the X-rays and went to the door. Her glance taking in Coleman, she said, "I suppose I'd better go and break the news." She made a small grimace. "This is one of the hard ones."

When the door had closed, Pearson turned to Coleman. He said with surprising courtesy, "Someone had to decide. I didn't ask your opinion then because I couldn't take the chance of letting it be known that there was doubt. If Lucy knew, she would have no choice but to tell the girl and her parents. And once they heard, they would want to delay. People always do; you can't blame them."

Coleman nodded. As the old man said, someone had to decide. All the same, he wondered if this amputation was necessary. Eventually, of course, they would know for sure. When the severed limb came down to the laboratory, dissection would show if the diagnosis of malignancy was right or wrong. Unfortunately, that would be too late to do the patient any good.

IN HIS HOTEL room Kent O'Donnell studied the programme of the surgeons' congress which was the ostensible reason for his presence in New York. There were three papers he wanted to hear—two on open-heart surgery and a third on replacement of diseased arteries by grafts. The first was not until eleven next morning.

It was seven thirty when he left the hotel and took a cab to Denise's address. At the twentieth-floor penthouse the lift doors slid back on a spacious carpeted hall. Opposite were double carved oak doors which a manservant now opened. He said, "Good evening, sir. Mrs. Quantz asked me to show you in. She'll be with you in a moment."

O'Donnell followed the man down a second hall and into a living-room almost as large as his entire apartment in Burlington. It opened on to a flagstoned terrace.

"May I get you something to drink, sir?" the manservant said.

"No, thanks," he answered. "I'll wait for Mrs. Quantz."

"You won't have to," a voice said. Denise came towards him, her hands held out. "Kent dear, I'm so glad to see you."

He looked at her. Then he said, "And I'm glad to see you," and added truthfully, "Until this moment I hadn't realized *how* glad."

She was even more beautiful than he remembered, with a radiance



that left him breathless. She had on a short evening dress of jet-black which accented her white skin. She smiled at him, her eyes warm.

She released one of his hands and with the other led him to the terrace. The manservant had preceded them, carrying a tray. He withdrew discreetly, and Denise poured two drinks and handed Kent one. She said softly, "Welcome to New York from a committee of one."

He sipped the Martini and said lightly, "Please thank the committee."

For a brief moment her eyes caught his. Then, taking his arm, she moved across the terrace towards the low, pillared balustrade. The lights of New York were flickering on in the warm, mellow dusk. From the streets below the throb of evening traffic was steady and insistent. A warm, soft breeze stirred around them, and he was conscious of Denise's closeness. She said softly, "It's beautiful, isn't it? I love it so, especially at this time of evening."

He said, "Have you ever considered going back—to Burlington, I mean—to live?"

"You can never go back," Denise said quietly. "I don't mean just Burlington, but everything else—time, people, places. You can revisit but it's never really the same; you're detached; you don't belong because

you've moved on." She paused. "I belong here now. I don't believe I could ever leave New York." He felt her hand on his arm. "Let's have one more cocktail," she said, "then you may take me to dinner."

THEY DINED and danced, and then they returned to Denise's apartment and the comfortable terrace overlooking Central Park.

"How long have you in New York?" Denise asked.

"I must go back after the meetings," he answered. "My patients expect me to be around and there's a lot of hospital business too."

Denise said, "I rather think I shall miss you."

He turned to face her. Without preliminary he said, "You know that I've never been married."

"Yes." She nodded gravely.

"I'm forty-two," he said. "In that time, living alone, one forms habits and patterns of life that might be hard to change and hard for someone else to accept." He paused. "What I'm trying to say, I suppose, is that I might be difficult to live with."

Denise reached out and covered his hand with her own. "Kent, darling, may I be clear about something?" She had the slightest of smiles. "Is this by any chance a proposal of marriage?"

O'Donnell felt absurdly, exuberantly boyish. "Now that you mention it," he said, "I rather think it is. I love you, Denise."

She looked at him searchingly. "I could love you too," she said. Then she added, choosing her words slowly, "At this moment everything in me tells me to say yes, dearest. But there's a whisper of caution. When you've made one mistake you need to be careful about committing yourself again. I've never fallen in with the popular idea that one can shed partners quickly and afterwards get over it, rather like taking an indigestion tablet. That's one of the reasons, I suppose, why I've never got a divorce."

"The divorce wouldn't be difficult?"

"Not really. But there's the other thing—you're in Burlington; I'm in New York."

He said carefully, "You really meant what you said, Denise—about not living in Burlington?"

She thought before answering. "Yes. I'm afraid I did. I couldn't live there—ever. There's no use pretending; I know myself too well." She

paused, then said: "This is a very selfish question, Kent, but have you ever considered moving your practice to New York?"

"Yes," he answered. "I'm thinking about it now."

It would not be difficult to get on the staff of a New York hospital, he thought. What really keeps me tied to Burlington? I'm not married to Three Counties Hospital, nor am I indispensable. There are things I'd miss. But New York means Denise. Wouldn't it be worth it?

"Kent, would you like a drink?" Denise asked.

"Perhaps later," he said, and reached out towards her. She came to him easily and their lips met. It was a lingering kiss and his arms tightened round her; then gently she disengaged herself.

"There's a great deal you don't know about me," she said. "For one thing, I'm terribly possessive. Did you know that?"

He answered, "It doesn't sound very terrible."

"If we were married," she said, "I'd have to have all of you, not just a part. I couldn't share you—not even with a hospital."

"I imagine we could work out a compromise. Other people do."

She turned back towards him. "When you say it like that I almost believe you. Will you come back to New York again—soon?"

"Yes," he answered. "Whenever you call me."

Chapter 12

THE AMPUTATION of Vivian's left leg began at eight thirty a.m. precisely. The procedure was not complicated, and Lucy Grainger anticipated only routine problems. She had already planned to amputate the limb fairly high, well above the knee. She had also planned where to cut her flaps so that the flesh would cover the stump adequately.

She had broken the news to Vivian the previous night—a sad, strained session in which the girl at first had been dry-eyed and composed and then, breaking down, had clung to Lucy, her despairing sobs acknowledging that the last barriers of hope had gone. Lucy, although accustomed by training and habit to be clinical and unemotional at such moments, had found herself unusually moved. The session with the parents, and later still with young Dr. Seddons, had been less personal but still troubling. Sometimes Lucy had to admit to herself that her surface detachment was only a pose, though a necessary one.

There was no pose, though, about detachment here in the operating-theatre; that was one place it became essential, and she found herself now, coolly and without personal feelings, assessing the immediate surgical requirements.

The anaesthetist, at the head of the operating table, had already given his clearance to proceed, and for five minutes the houseman had held the leg vertical to allow the blood to drain out. Now a pneumatic tourniquet was inflated and the houseman lowered the limb until it rested on the table. With a nurse, he draped the patient with a sterile green sheet until only the operative portion of the leg remained exposed, and Lucy began painting the surgical area with alcoholic Zephiran.

There was an audience in the operating-theatre today—two medical students. Lucy beckoned them closer. The nurse passed a knife, and Lucy began to scrape the tip of the blade against the thigh, talking as she worked, explaining what she planned to do to make an artificial leg, later, fit as comfortably as possible.

As she was speaking, she thought: In little more than an hour this leg would be severed and a young girl—little more than a child—would have lost, for always, a part of her life. Never again would she run freely, or dance, or swim, or ride horseback, or, uninhibited, make love. Some of these things she would eventually do with mechanical aid; but nothing again could ever be quite the same. This was the heart of the tragedy: it had happened too soon.

MIKE SEDDONS was, quite literally, sweating out the period while Vivian was undergoing surgery. With the Loburtons, he had gone to one of the small waiting-rooms reserved for relatives. Now, in the uneasy backwater of the sparsely furnished room with its uncomfortable leatherette chairs and varnished tables, the three of them had run out of even the most perfunctory conversation.

Seddons found himself wondering how it would be between himself and Vivian in the time ahead. Which of them would prove, in the end, more resolute and more enduring? He knew that no two people were ever quite equal in strength of character or even in the capacity to love. He knew, too, that difference in sex had little to do with it, that women were often stouter in mind and heart than men.

Was Vivian stronger than himself, her character finer, her courage

higher? The question had come to him last night and had remained with him since. He had gone to see her, knowing the decision had been made to amputate and aware that Vivian knew it too. He had found her not in tears but smiling. "Come in, Mike darling," she had said, "and please don't look so glum. Dr. Grainger's told me, and I've done my crying, and it's over now."

At the words he had felt his love for her deepen, and he had held her and kissed her passionately. Afterwards she had looked directly into his eyes. "I'm going to have just one leg, Mike," she had said, "for all the rest of my life. I won't be the girl you met—not as you met me, and not as you know me now. If you want to back out, I'll understand."

He had answered emphatically, "Don't talk like that!"

"Why?" she had said. "Are you afraid to talk about it?"

"No!" It was a loud, firm protest, but even as he made it he had known it to be a lie. He *was* afraid, just as he sensed that Vivian was not—not now, not any more. For the first time a feeling of uneasy doubt had assailed him.

Mr. Loburton had stopped his pacing. "Michael," he said, "it's been an hour and a half. Can they be very much longer?"

Seddons shook his head. "I don't believe so. Dr. Grainger said she'd come here immediately after." He paused, then added, "We should all know something—very soon."

REACHING INTO the incubator, Dr. Dornberger carefully examined the Alexander baby. Three and a half days had gone by since birth, a fact which, of itself, might normally be taken as a hopeful sign. But there were disquieting symptoms, increasingly apparent. The prognosis was extremely poor. "You know," he said, "I thought for a while he was going to make it."

The young nurse in charge—the same nurse John Alexander had seen a few days before—had been looking at Dornberger expectantly. She said, "His breathing was quite steady until an hour ago, then it became weak. That was when I called you."

"No, he's not breathing well," Dornberger said slowly. He went on, thinking out loud, trying to be sure there was nothing he had missed. "There's more jaundice than there should be, and the feet seem swollen. Tell me again—what was the blood count?"

The charge nurse consulted her clip board. "R.B.C. four point nine million. Seven nucleated red cells per hundred white."

There was another pause while Dornberger digested the information. Then he said, "You know, if it weren't for that sensitivity report I'd suspect this child had erythroblastosis."

The charge nurse looked surprised. She said, "But surely, Doctor—" then checked herself.

"I know—it couldn't happen." He motioned to the clip board. "All the same, let me see that lab. report—the original one on the mother's blood."

It was the report which Dr. Pearson had signed following the altercation with David Coleman. Dornberger studied it, then handed it back. "Well, that's definite enough—negative sensitivity."

It should be definite, of course; but at the back of his mind was a nagging thought: Could the report be wrong? Impossible, he told himself; Joe would never make a mistake like that. All the same, he decided, he would drop in and talk to him after rounds.

To the charge nurse Dornberger said, "There's nothing more we can do at the moment. Call me again, please, if there's any change."

AS THE DAYS went by, Joe Pearson made no reference to David Coleman's activities in the serology laboratory. Coleman had no idea what this silence implied, but he fell into the habit of dropping into the laboratory regularly and reviewing the work. Between himself and Bannister there was what amounted to an armed truce. Alexander, on the other hand, made it plain that he welcomed Coleman's attention and had already made a few suggestions which Coleman had approved.

This day Coleman opened the door of the laboratory, to find Alexander at the centre bench and, facing him, a white-coated woman whom Coleman recalled vaguely having seen round the hospital.

As he entered, Alexander was saying, "I think perhaps you should ask Dr. Pearson or Dr. Coleman. I'll be making my report to them."

"What report is that?" As Coleman asked casually, the heads of the other two turned towards him.

The woman spoke first. "Oh, Doctor!" She looked at him inquiringly. "You are Dr. Coleman?"

"That's right."

"I'm Hilda Straughan." She offered him her hand and added, "Chief dietitian."

"How do you do. Is there some sort of problem we can help you with?" He knew from his own experience that pathologists and dietitians usually worked closely in matters of food hygiene.

"There's been a lot of intestinal flu these past few weeks. If food is the reason I'd like to pin down the cause if it's possible. Then one can try to prevent the same thing occurring again."

There was an earnestness about this woman which David Coleman found himself respecting. He asked politely, "Do you have any ideas?"

"Very definitely. I suspect my dishwashing machines, Dr. C. My hot-water booster system is quite inadequate."

The form of address and phraseology tempted him to smile. He asked, "Has anyone ever pointed that out?"

"I certainly have, Dr. C. I've talked to Mr. Tomaselli on several occasions. It was my last talk with Mr. T., in fact, which caused him to ask Dr. Pearson for these new lab. tests on the dishwashers."

Coleman turned to Alexander. "What did the tests show?"

"The water temperature *isn't* high enough." Alexander consulted a clip board. "I did three tests on each dishwasher, each at a different time of day, and the temperature range was one hundred and ten to one hundred and thirty degrees."

Coleman said, "That's much too low."

"That isn't all, Doctor." John Alexander took a slide from the laboratory bench. "I'm afraid I've found gas formers of the faecal group on the plates—*after* they've been through the dishwashers."

"Let me see." Coleman took the slide and moved to the microscope. When he had adjusted the eyepiece the characteristic worm-like bacteria were visible at once. He straightened up and said, "The slide definitely shows that gas-forming bacteria are getting through the dishwashers on to your clean plates, Mrs. Straughan. This probably accounts for some of the intestinal flu you spoke of, but that's not too serious in itself. The way in which it might become dangerous is if we happened to get a disease carrier in the hospital—someone who carries disease germs in his body without having the clinical disease himself. A carrier can be an apparently normal, healthy person. It happens more frequently than you'd think." He turned to Bannister, who had come into the laboratory

during the discussion. "I suppose we *are* doing regular lab. checks on all food handlers in the hospital?"

Bannister answered, self-importantly, "Oh yes. Dr. Pearson's very fussy about that."

"Are we right up to date?"

The senior technician thought, then said, "Don't think we've had any for quite a while. Just a minute. I'll look at the book."

In his mind David Coleman was weighing the factors involved. If the dishwashers were inefficient—and they appeared to be—something needed to be done promptly; there was no question about that. On the other hand, as long as a careful check was being kept on food handlers—and, according to Bannister, it was—there was no real reason for alarm. Indifference, though, was something else again.

Bannister looked up from a ruled ledger he had spread open on a file cabinet. He called out, "February the twenty-fourth."

Surprised, Coleman asked, "Did you say February? That's almost six months ago." To the dietitian he observed, "You don't appear to have much of a turnover in kitchen staff."

"Oh, we do—unfortunately." Mrs. Straughan shook her head emphatically. "We've taken on a lot of people since February, Dr. C."

Still not understanding, Coleman asked Bannister, "But what about the new employees—those who've been taken on since then?"

Bannister shrugged. "If the hospital health office doesn't send us specimens for test, we've no way of knowing about new food handlers." His attitude was one of indifference, almost contempt.

A slow anger was rising in Coleman. Controlling it, he said evenly to the dietitian, "I think this is a matter you should look into." For the first time he had begun to realize that something, somewhere, was seriously wrong.

Mrs. Straughan appeared to have had the same thought. She said, "I will—immediately. Thank you, Dr. C." She went out of the laboratory.

There was a moment's silence. For the first time Coleman sensed a feeling of unease in Bannister. As their eyes met he asked the technician icily, "Had it occurred to you to wonder *why* no tests for food handlers were coming in?"

"Well" Bannister fidgeted, his earlier confidence evaporated. "I guess I would have—sooner or later."

Coleman surveyed the other with disgust. He said angrily, "I'd say later—especially if it meant that you would have had to do some thinking." At the door he turned. "I'll be with Dr. Pearson."

The colour drained from his face, the older technician still stood, looking at the door through which Coleman had gone. "He knows it all, don't he? Everything in the book."

Bannister's familiar world was crumbling. A new order was emerging, and in the new order, through his own shortcoming, there was no room for himself. Time was passing him by.

JOE PEARSON looked up from his desk as Coleman came in. Without preliminary the young pathologist announced, "John Alexander has found gas-forming bacteria on plates which have been through the dishwasher."

Pearson seemed unsurprised. He said dourly, "It's the hot-water system."

"I know." David Coleman tried, but failed, to keep sarcasm from his voice. "Has anyone ever tried to do something about it?"

The old man was looking at him quizzically. He said, with surprising quietness, "I suppose you think things are run pretty poorly here."

"Since you ask me—yes." Coleman's lips were tight.

Pearson flung open a drawer of his desk, fumbling among files as he searched. He seemed to be speaking with a strange mixture of anger and sorrow. "You're so young and green and full of lofty ideas. You come here, and it happens to be a time when there's a new administration, when money is freer than it has been for years. So you imagine that whatever's wrong is because nobody has thought of changing it. Nobody's tried!" He flung a bulging file of papers on the desk. "This is a record of correspondence about the kitchen hot-water supply. If you'll take the trouble to read it, you'll find I've been pleading for a new system for years."

Opening the file, Coleman read the top memo. He turned a page, then another, then skimmed the other pages beneath. At once he realized how much in error he had been. The memos contained a damning condemnation by Pearson of hospital kitchen hygiene, couched in even stronger terms than he would have used himself. The correspondence appeared to go back several years.

Without hesitation Coleman said, "I'm sorry. I owe you an apology—about that anyway."

"Never mind." Pearson waved his hand irritably, then as the words sank in, "You mean there's something else?"

Coleman said evenly, "In finding out about the dishwashers I also discovered there haven't been any lab. tests on food handlers for more than six months. Apparently none were sent down from the health office. The chief dietitian is checking on that now."

"You mean nobody in Pathology asked why none were coming?"

"Apparently not."

"That fool Bannister! This is serious." Pearson was genuinely concerned, his hostility to Coleman forgotten. He picked up the telephone. After a pause he said, "Get me the administrator."

The conversation which followed was brief and to the point. At the end Pearson replaced the phone and stood up. To Coleman he said, "Tomaselli is on his way down. Let's meet him in the lab."

IN THE LABORATORY, Pearson inspected the slides. Mrs. Straughan came in as he straightened up from the microscope.

Tomaselli turned to her. "What did you find out?"

"It's incredible but true." Mrs. Straughan shook her head in a gesture of unbelief. She addressed Pearson. "Earlier this year the health office engaged a new clerk. Nobody told her about lab. tests on food handlers. That's the reason none were sent down."

Tomaselli said, "So there have been no tests now for—how long?"

"Approximately six months."

Coleman noticed Carl Bannister standing dourly away from the group, apparently occupied, but he sensed the senior technician was missing nothing of what was going on.

The administrator asked Pearson, "What do you suggest?"

"There should be a check-up first on all the new employees—as quickly as possible." Pearson was incisive and brisk. "After that there will have to be re-examination of all the others. That means stool culture, chest X-ray and a medical. And it should include all the kitchen workers and anyone else who has anything to do with food at all."

"Will you arrange that, Mrs. Straughan?" Tomaselli said.

"I'll get on to it right away, Mr. T." She hurried out.

"Is there anything else?" Tomaselli turned back to Pearson.

"We need a new steam booster system for those dishwashers—either that or rip them right out and put new ones in." Pearson's voice rose heatedly. "I've been telling everybody that for years."

"I know." Tomaselli nodded. "It's on our list. The trouble is, we've had so many capital expenditures." He mused. "I wonder what the comparative cost would be."

Unreasonably, irritably, Pearson said, "How should I know? I'm not the plumber."

"I know a little about plumbing; perhaps I can help." At the softly spoken words the others turned their heads. It was Dr. Dornberger, who had come into the laboratory quietly and unnoticed.

Dornberger saw John Alexander watching him. He said, "I was with your baby a while ago, son. I'm afraid he's not doing too well."

"Is there any hope, Doctor?" Alexander asked quietly.

"Not very much, I'm afraid," Dornberger said slowly. There was a silence; then, as if remembering something, he turned to Pearson. "I suppose, Joe, there couldn't be any doubt about that blood-sensitization test on Mrs. Alexander? I mean, that it could be wrong."

Pearson shook his head. "No doubt at all, Charlie. I did it myself—very carefully. Why do you ask?"

"Just checking." Dornberger puffed at his pipe. "For a while this morning I suspected the child might have erythroblastosis. It was only a long shot though."

Coleman wanted to say something—anything to make things easier for Alexander. He told Dornberger, almost without thinking, "There used to be some doubt about sensitization tests—when labs. were using just the saline and high-protein methods. Nowadays, with an indirect Coombs test as well, it's pretty well foolproof."

"But, Dr. Coleman . . ." Alexander's eyes were alarmed. "We didn't do an indirect Coombs test."

"Oh yes, you did," Coleman said. "I remember signing the requisition for Coombs serum."

Alexander looked at him despairingly. "But Dr. Pearson said it wasn't necessary. The test was done just in saline and high protein."

Pearson appeared uncomfortable. He said to Coleman, "I meant to tell you at the time. It slipped my mind."

Dornberger cut in abruptly. "Let me get this straight. You mean Mrs. Alexander may have sensitized blood after all?"

"Of course she may!" Coleman lashed out. He wheeled on Bannister, his eyes merciless. "What happened to the requisition I signed for Coombs serum?"

Bannister, barely audible, mumbled, "I tore it up."

Dornberger said incredulously, "You tore up a doctor's requisition—without telling him? On whose instructions?"

Bannister said reluctantly, "On Dr. Pearson's instructions."

"This means the child may have erythroblastosis," Dornberger said. "Everything points to it, in fact."

"Then you'll do an exchange transfusion?"

Dornberger said bitterly, "If it was necessary at all, it should have been done at birth. But there may be a chance, even this late." He looked at the young pathologist as if, by implication, only Coleman's opinion could be trusted. "But I want to be sure. The child hasn't any strength to spare."

"We need a direct Coombs test of the baby's blood." Coleman's reaction was fast and competent. Pearson was standing still, as if dazed by the swiftness of what had happened.

Tomaselli asked, "Where can we get the serum?"

"There isn't time." Coleman shook his head. "We'll have to get the test done somewhere else—where they've facilities."

"Dr. Franz at University will do it; they've a bigger lab. than ours anyway." Harry Tomaselli had crossed to the telephone and was busy getting the number. "Who'll talk with him?"

"I will." Coleman took the phone. The others heard him say, "Dr. Franz? This is Dr. Coleman—assistant pathologist at Three Counties. Could you handle an emergency Coombs test for us?" There was a pause. Then he said, "Yes, we'll send the sample immediately. Thank you, Doctor. Good-bye." He turned back to the room. "We'll need the blood sample quickly."

"I'll help you, Doctor." It was Bannister, a tray in his hands.

About to reject the offer, Coleman saw the mute appeal in the man's eyes. He hesitated, then said, "Very well. You and Alexander can come with me."

As they left, Tomaselli called after them. "I'll get a police car. They'll

get the sample over there faster." He went out, leaving Pearson and Dornberger alone.

Within the past few moments a ferment of thoughts had been seething in the elderly obstetrician's mind. Inevitably, in his long years of medical practice, Charles Dornberger had had patients die. Sometimes there had seemed almost a predestination about their deaths. But always he had fought for their lives, and always he could tell himself truthfully that he had behaved with honour, his standards high, nothing left to chance, the utmost of his skill expended. Never, to the best of his own knowledge, had Charles Dornberger failed a patient through inadequacy or neglect. Until this moment. Now, it seemed, near the close of his career, he was to share the sad and bitter harvest of another man's incompetence; and, worse—a man who was a friend.

"Joe," he said, "there's something I'd like you to know."

Pearson had lowered himself to a lab. stool, his face drained of colour, his eyes unfocused. Now he looked up slowly.

"This was a premature baby, Joe; but it was normal, and we could have done an exchange transfusion right after birth." Dornberger paused, and when he went on the turmoil of his own emotions was in his voice. "Joe, we've been friends a long time, and sometimes I've covered up for you, and I've helped you fight your battles. But this time, if this baby dies, so help me God!—I'll take you before the medical board and I'll break you in two."

Chapter 13

"WHAT ARE they *doing* over there? Why haven't we heard yet?" Dr. Pearson's fingers drummed a nervous tattoo upon his office desk. It was an hour and a quarter since the blood sample had been dispatched to University Hospital. Now the senior pathologist and David Coleman were alone in the office.

Coleman said quietly, "I called Dr. Franz a second time. He said he'll phone the moment they have a result."

"Where's the boy—Alexander?"

"He's with his wife." Coleman hesitated. "While we're waiting—do you think we should call the health office and make sure checks are being started on the food handlers?"

Pearson shook his head. "Later—when all this is over. I can't think of anything else until this thing is settled."

For the first time since this morning's events, David Coleman found himself wondering what the older man was feeling. He had not argued the validity of Coleman's statements concerning the sensitization test, and his silence seemed a tacit admission that his younger colleague was better informed than himself. Coleman thought: It must be a bitter thing to face; and he felt a stirring of sympathy for the other man.

Pearson stopped drumming and slammed his hand hard on the desk. "For Pete's sake," he said, "why don't they call?"

"How CLOSE are we to being ready?"

Dr. Charles Dornberger, scrubbed and waiting in a small operating-theatre which adjoined Obstetrics, asked the question of the charge nurse who had entered. The nurse filled two rubber hot-water bottles and placed them beneath a blanket on the tiny operating table that was used for infants. She answered, "Just a few minutes more."

A houseman had joined Dornberger. He asked, "Do you intend to go ahead with an exchange transfusion—even if you don't have the Coombs test result?"

"Yes," Dornberger answered. "We've lost enough time already. In any case, the anaemia in the child now is sufficiently marked to justify a blood exchange even without the test." Turning back to the nurse, he asked, "Is the blood being warmed?"

She nodded, "Yes, Doctor."

Dornberger told the houseman, "It's important to make sure the new blood is close to body temperature. Otherwise it increases the danger of shock."

Dornberger was aware that he was talking as much for his own benefit as for the instruction of the houseman. Talking prevented him from thinking too deeply, and for the moment deep thinking was something he wanted to avoid. His patient might die because of the worst kind of medical negligence, and the ultimate responsibility was his alone. About to continue explaining to the houseman, he checked himself abruptly. Something was wrong; he had a feeling of dizziness; his head was throbbing, the room swirling. Momentarily he closed his eyes, and then opened them. It was all right; things were back in focus, the

dizziness almost gone. But when he looked down at his hands he saw they were trembling. He tried to control the movement and failed.

The incubator containing the Alexander baby was being wheeled in. At the same moment he heard the houseman ask, "Dr. Dornberger—are you all right?"

It was on the edge of his tongue to answer "Yes." He knew that if he did he could carry on, concealing what had happened, with no one but himself aware of it. And then perhaps, even at this late moment, by exercise of skill and judgment he could save this child.

Then, in the same moment, he remembered all that he had said over the years—about old men clinging to power too long; his conviction that he would never handle a case with his own facilities impaired. He looked down at his shaking hands.

"No," he said, "I don't think I am all right." He paused and, aware for the first time of a deep emotion which made it hard to control his voice, he asked, "Will someone please call Dr. O'Donnell? Tell him I'm unable to go on. I'd like him to take over."

At that moment, in fact and in heart, Dr. Charles Dornberger retired from the practice of medicine.

AS THE BELL rang Pearson snatched the phone from its cradle. "Yes, this is Dr. Pearson." He listened. "Very well. Thanks."

Without putting the receiver back he flashed the exchange and asked for an extension number. There was a click, then an answer, and Pearson said, "Get me Dr. Dornberger."

A voice spoke briefly, then Pearson said, "All right, then give him a message. Tell him the blood test on the Alexander baby is positive. The child has erythroblastosis." Pearson replaced the phone. Then he looked up, to find David Coleman's eyes upon him.

DR. KENT O'DONNELL was striding through the hospital's main floor on his way to Neurology when he heard the sound of his own name on the hospital P.A. system. He looked about him for a telephone on which to acknowledge the call and saw one in a glass-enclosed accounting office a few yards away. Receiving Dornberger's message, he headed for the lift which would take him to the fourth floor and Obstetrics.

While Kent O'Donnell scrubbed, Dornberger described what had happened in the case and his own reason for calling in the chief of Surgery. Only at two points did O'Donnell stop him to interject sharp questions; the remainder of the time he listened carefully, his expression growing grimmer. He thought bitterly: I could have fired Joe Pearson; there was plenty of reason to. But no! I procrastinated, playing politics, convincing myself I was behaving reasonably, while all the time I was betraying medicine. He took a sterile towel and dried his hands, then plunged them into gloves which a nurse held out. "All right," he told Dornberger. "Let's go in."

Entering the small operating-theatre, O'Donnell ran his eye over the equipment which had been made ready. The tiny baby had been taken from its incubator and secured in place on the warm operating table. O'Donnell noticed the baby lay very still, making only the slightest of responses to what was being done. In a child so small it was not a hopeful sign. The assisting nurse unfolded a sterile sheet and draped it over the infant, leaving exposed only the head and navel, the latter area still in process of healing where the umbilical cord had been severed at birth. A local anaesthetic had already been administered and O'Donnell picked up a gauze pad and began to prepare the operative area. The houseman had taken up a clip board and pencil. O'Donnell asked him, "You're going to keep score?"

"Yes, sir."

A few minutes ago two student nurses had slipped into the room and now, following a habit of instruction, O'Donnell began to describe procedure as he worked. "An exchange transfusion is actually a flushing-out process. First we remove some blood from the child, then replace it with an equivalent amount of donor blood. After that we do the same thing again and keep doing it until most of the original, unhealthy blood is gone."

The assisting nurse was inverting a pint bottle of blood on a stand above the table. O'Donnell said, "The blood bank has already cross-matched the patient's blood with that of the donor to ensure that they are compatible. What we must be sure of also is that we replace exactly the amount of blood we removed. That's the reason we keep a score sheet." He indicated the houseman's clip board.

"Temperature ninety-six," the assisting nurse announced.

O'Donnell said, "Knife, please," and held out his hand.

Using the knife gently, he cut off the dry portion of the umbilical vein, exposing moist tissue. He put down the knife and said softly, "Haemostat."

The houseman was craning over, watching. O'Donnell said, "We've isolated the umbilical vein. I'll go into it now and remove the clot." He held out his hand and the nurse passed forceps. The blood clot was minuscule, scarcely visible, and he drew it out gently. Handling a child this small was like working with a tiny doll. What were the chances of the child's survival, O'Donnell wondered. Ordinarily they might have been fair, even good. But now, with this procedure days late, the hope of success had been lessened drastically. He glanced at the child's face. Strangely it was not an ugly face, as the faces of premature children so often were; it was even a little handsome, with a firm jaw line and a hint of latent strength. What a shame, he thought—to be born with so much stacked against you.

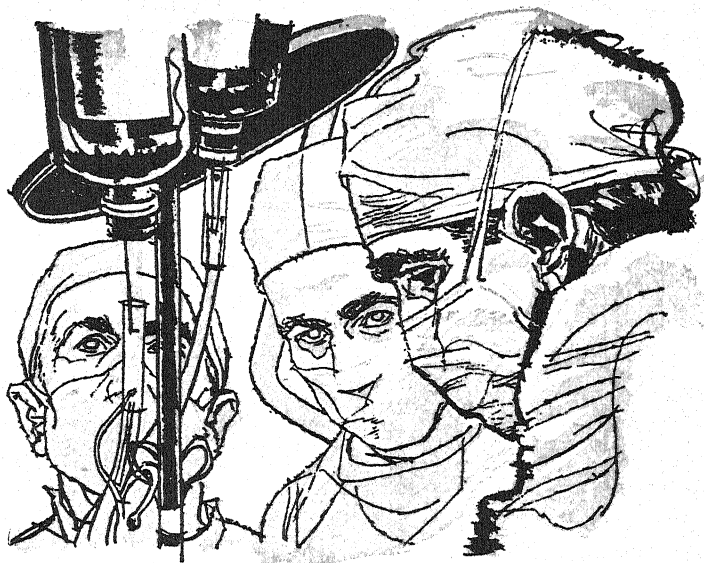
The assisting nurse was holding a plastic catheter with a needle attached through which the blood would be drawn off and replaced. O'Donnell took the catheter and with utmost gentleness eased the needle into the umbilical vein. He said, "Check the venous pressure, please."

As he held the catheter vertical, the nurse used a rule to measure the height of the column of blood. She announced, "Sixty millimetres." The houseman wrote it down.

A second plastic tube led to the bottle of blood above them; a third ran to one of the two metal bowls at the foot of the table. Bringing the three tubes together, O'Donnell connected them to a twenty-millilitre syringe with a three-way stopcock at one end. He turned one of the stopcocks through ninety degrees. "Now," he said, "we'll begin withdrawing blood."

His fingers sensitive, he eased the plunger of the syringe towards him gently. The blood began to flow, flooding the catheter tube and entering the syringe. O'Donnell said, "You'll notice that I'm suctioning very slowly and carefully. We'll also remove very little at any one time in this case—because of the smallness of the infant. In this instance I shall take only ten millilitres, so as to avoid too much fluctuation of the venous pressure."

On his score sheet the houseman wrote: "10 ml. out."



Once more O'Donnell turned one of the stopcocks on the syringe, then pressed hard on the plunger. As he did, the blood withdrawn from the child was expelled into one of the metal bowls.

Turning the stopcock again, he withdrew donor blood into the syringe, then, tenderly and slowly, injected it into the child.

On his score sheet the houseman wrote: "10 ml. in."

Painstakingly O'Donnell went on. Each withdrawal and replacement, gradual, careful, took five full minutes. Twenty-five minutes after they had started, the baby stirred and cried. It was a frail, thready cry—a weak and feeble protest that ended almost as soon as it began. But it was a signal of life, and above the masks of those in the room eyes were smiling, and somehow hope seemed a trifle closer.

O'Donnell knew better than to jump to hasty conclusions. Nevertheless, over his shoulder to Dornberger he said, "Sounds like he's mad at us. Could be a good sign." He was conscious of a lessening of tension in the room and began to wonder if, after everything, this baby would pull through. He had learned long ago that nothing was impossible,

that in medicine the unexpected was just as often on your side as against you. "All right," he said. "Let's keep going."

He withdrew ten millilitres, then replaced it; he withdrew another ten and replaced that. Another ten, in and out; and another.

Then, fifty minutes after they had begun, the nurse announced quietly, "The patient's temperature is falling, Doctor. It's ninety-four point three."

He said quickly, "Check the venous pressure."

It was thirty-five—much too low.

"He's not breathing well," the houseman said. "Colour isn't good."

O'Donnell told him, "Check the pulse." To the nurse he said, "Oxygen."

She reached for a rubber mask and held it over the infant's face. A moment later there was a hiss as the oxygen went on.

"Pulse very slow," the houseman said.

The nurse said, "Temperature's down to ninety-three."

The houseman was listening with a stethoscope. He looked up. "Respiration's failing." Then, a moment later, "He's stopped breathing."

O'Donnell took the stethoscope and listened. He could hear a heart-beat, but it was very faint. He said sharply, "Coramine—one cc." As the houseman turned from the table, O'Donnell ripped off the covering sheets and began artificial respiration. In a moment, the houseman was back; in his hand was a hypodermic syringe.

"Straight in the heart," O'Donnell said. "It's our only chance."

IN THE PATHOLOGY office David Coleman was growing restless. Close to an hour had gone by since the message from University about the blood test and there was still no word from Dornberger.

Coleman knew himself to be almost as tense as Pearson, although at this moment the older man was showing his anxiety more. He took no satisfaction from the fact that he had been right and Pearson wrong about the blood test. All he wanted, desperately, was for the Alexander child to live. The force of his feeling startled him; it was unusual for anything to affect him so deeply. He recalled, though, that he had liked John Alexander right from the beginning at Three Counties; then later, meeting his wife, knowing all three of them had their origins in the

same town, he had felt springing up a sense of unspoken kinship.

He speculated on the fact that Elizabeth had Rh-sensitized blood and on how this might have come about. She could, of course, have become sensitized during her first pregnancy; it need not have affected their first child. It was much more common to find the effect of Rh sensitization during a second pregnancy.

Another possibility, of course, was that Elizabeth might have been given a transfusion of Rh-positive blood at some time or other. He concentrated, frowning. Then suddenly the pieces were in place: the accident at New Richmond in 1949 at which Elizabeth's father had been killed, and she herself had been injured. He remembered now what John Alexander had said about Elizabeth that day: *Elizabeth almost died. But they gave her blood transfusions and she made it. . . .*

Coleman thought: Existence of the Rh factor only became known to medicine in the 1940's; after that it had taken another ten years before Rh testing was generally adopted by hospitals and doctors. In the meantime, there were plenty of places where blood transfusions were given without an Rh cross match; New Richmond was probably one.

A new thought struck him: it was his own father who had taken care of the Alexander family, who would have ordered the transfusions Elizabeth Alexander had received! At the time, of course, there would have been no apparent effect from her receiving Rh-positive blood, except that her own blood would be building antibodies to lurk hidden and unsuspected until years later they destroyed her child.

Naturally, Dr. Byron Coleman could not be blamed. He would have prescribed in good faith. It was true that at the time the Rh factor was known and in some places Rh cross-matching was already in effect. But a busy country G.P. could scarcely be expected to keep up with everything that was new. Or could he? Was this an excuse that he himself—David Coleman—would accept from others? Or was he more lenient in judging his own kin? Coleman wished he had not thought of this. It gave him an uneasy feeling of not being absolutely sure . . . of anything.

Pearson looked across at him. He asked, "How long is it now?"

Coleman checked his watch. "Just over an hour."

"I'm going to call them." Impetuously Pearson reached for the telephone. Then he hesitated and drew his hand away. "No," he said, "I suppose I'd better not."

IN THE SEROLOGY laboratory John Alexander, too, was conscious of the time. An hour ago he had come back from visiting Elizabeth, and since then he had made several attempts to work. But his mind was far removed from what he was doing and, rather than risk mistakes, he had desisted. Now, taking up a test-tube, he prepared to begin again, but Bannister came over and took it from him.

"I'll do that," the older technician said gently.

He protested half-heartedly, then Bannister said, "Go on, kid; leave it to me. Why don't you go up with your wife?"

"Thanks all the same, but I think I'll stay. Dr. Coleman said as soon as he heard . . . he'd come and tell me." Alexander's eyes turned to the wall clock again. He said, his voice strained, "They can't be much longer now."

Bannister turned away. "No," he said slowly, "I guess not."

KENT O'DONNELL was sweating, and the assisting nurse leaned forward to mop his forehead. Five minutes had passed since artificial respiration had begun, and still there was no response from the tiny body under his hands. Gently, once more, he squeezed and relaxed, the oxygen hissing, trying to induce breath, to coax the tired, tiny lungs back into life with movement of their own.

O'Donnell wanted this baby to live. He knew, if it died, it would mean that Three Counties—his hospital—had failed abjectly in its most basic function: to give proper care to the sick and the weak. This child had not had proper care; it had been given the poorest when it needed the best. He found himself trying to transmit his own burning fervour through his finger-tips to the faltering heart lying beneath them. *You needed us and we failed you. You found us wanting. But please let us try—again, together. Sometimes we do better than this; don't judge us for always by just one failure. There's ignorance and folly—we've shown you that already. But there are other things, too; good, warm things to live for. So breathe!* O'Donnell's hands moved back and forth . . . compressing . . . releasing . . . compressing . . . releasing . . .

Another five minutes had passed and the houseman was using his stethoscope, listening carefully. Now he straightened up and shook his head. O'Donnell stopped; he knew it was useless to go on.

Turning to Dornberger, he said quietly, "I'm afraid he's gone."

Their eyes met, and both men knew their feelings were the same.

O'Donnell felt himself gripped by a white-hot fury. Fiercely he ripped off the mask and cap; he tore at the rubber gloves and flung them savagely to the floor.

He felt the others' eyes upon him. His lips in a thin, grim line, he told Dornberger, "All right. Let's go." Then, harshly, to the houseman, "If anyone should want me, I'll be with Dr. Pearson."

IN THE PATHOLOGY office the telephone bell jangled sharply and Pearson reached out for the receiver. Then, his face pale, nervousness showing, he stopped. He said to Coleman, "You take it."

David Coleman picked up the telephone, listened, expressionless, then said, "Thank you," and hung up.

His eyes met Pearson's. He said quietly, "The baby just died."

The other man said nothing. Motionless, slouched in the office chair, he seemed aged and defeated. Coleman said softly, "I think I'll go to the lab. Someone should talk with John."

There was no answer. As Coleman left the Pathology office, Pearson was still sitting, silent and unmoving, his eyes unseeing, his thoughts known only to himself.

JOHN ALEXANDER made no attempt to turn round as Coleman approached him where he sat in the laboratory.

Alexander asked softly, "It's . . . over?"

Without answering Coleman reached out his hand. He let it rest on the other's shoulder.

Alexander turned slowly. His face was strained, the tears streaming. He said, softly but intensely, "Why, Dr. Coleman? Why?"

Groping for words, he tried to answer. "Your baby was premature, John. His chances were not good—even if . . . the other . . . hadn't happened."

Looking him directly in the eyes, Alexander said, "But he *might* have lived."

This was a moment in which evasion had no place. "Yes," Coleman said. "He might have lived."

John Alexander rose to his feet, his eyes imploring. "How could it happen . . . in a hospital . . . with doctors?"

"John," Coleman said, "at this moment I haven't any answer for you." He added, "At this moment I haven't any answer for myself."

Alexander nodded dumbly. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Then he said quietly, "Thank you for coming to tell me. I'll go to Elizabeth now."

KENT O'DONNELL had not spoken during his progress through the hospital with Dr. Dornberger; the intense anger and frustration which had engulfed him as he had looked down at the dead child kept him tight-lipped and silent. Then, as they came to Pearson's door, he suddenly felt his anger lessen and sorrow take its place. He knocked, and Dornberger followed him in.

Joe Pearson was still sitting exactly as Coleman had left him. He looked up but made no attempt to rise.

Dornberger spoke first, quietly, without antagonism, as if wanting to set the mood of this meeting as a service to an old friend. He said, "The baby died, Joe. I suppose you heard."

Pearson said slowly, "Yes. I heard."

"I've told Kent everything that happened." Dornberger's voice was unsteady. "I'm sorry, Joe. There wasn't much else I could do."

Pearson made a small, helpless gesture with his hands. There was no trace of his old aggressiveness. Matching his tone to Dornberger's, O'Donnell asked, "Is there anything you want to say, Joe?"

Twice, slowly, Pearson shook his head.

"Joe, if it were just this one thing" O'Donnell found himself searching for the right words, knowing they did not exist. "We all make mistakes. Maybe I could" This was not what he had intended to say. He steadied his voice and went on more firmly. "But it's a long list. Joe, if I have to bring this before the medical board, I think you know how they'll feel. You could make it less painful for yourself, and for all of us, if your resignation were in the administrator's office by ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

Pearson looked at O'Donnell. "Ten o'clock," he said. "You shall have it."

There was a pause. O'Donnell turned away, then back. "Of course, you'll be eligible for pension. It's only fair after thirty-two years." As he said the words O'Donnell knew they had a hollow ring.

For the first time since they had come in Pearson's expression changed. He looked at O'Donnell with a slight, sardonic smile. "Thanks."

Thirty-two years! O'Donnell thought; and to have it end like this! He wanted to say something more: to find phrases in which to speak of the good things Joe Pearson had done. He was still debating how when Harry Tomaselli came in.

The administrator had not waited to knock. "Joe," he said, "can you come to my office immediately? There's an emergency staff meeting in an hour. I'd like to talk with you first."

O'Donnell said sharply, "An emergency meeting? What for?"

"Typhoid has been discovered in the hospital," Tomaselli said. "Dr. Chandler has reported two cases, with four more suspected. We've an epidemic on our hands and we have to find the source."

As ELIZABETH looked up, the door opened and John came in. They spoke only with their eyes—in grief, entreaty, and an overwhelming love. She held out her arms and he came into them. "Johnny! Johnny, darling." It was all she could murmur before she began to cry.

After a while, when he had held her tightly, he moved back, then dried her tears with the same handkerchief he had used for his own.

Later still he said, "Elizabeth, honey, if you're still willing, there's something I'd like to do."

"Whatever it is," she answered, "it's 'yes.'"

"You always wanted it," he said. "Now I want it too. I'll write for the papers tomorrow. I'm going to try for medical school."

Chapter 14

VIVIAN'S PROGRESS since her surgery had been good, physically and psychologically. The overwhelming agony had eased and the thigh was healing well. There were still moments of blackness and despair when she was alone. But mostly she banished the moods, using her innate strength and courage to rise above them.

Lucy Grainger was grateful for this; it made her own task of supervising the healing process easier. She knew, of course—and was aware that Vivian knew it too—that the osteogenic sarcoma Pearson had diagnosed might have metastasized before the amputation, spreading

its malignancy elsewhere in Vivian's body. In that case there would be little more that medicine could do for Vivian beyond temporary, palliative relief. For the present the short-term prognosis seemed reasonably bright. And for Vivian's sake it seemed best to assume that the future stretched indefinitely ahead.

Mike Seddons had come to see Vivian as often as possible and this afternoon he had been sitting near her bedside listening to her talk. Now he got up and paced about the small hospital room. "But it's ridiculous," he said heatedly. "It's absurd; it isn't necessary, and I won't do it! It's just some silly idea out of a fourth-rate sentimental novel."

"Mike darling, I love you so much when you get mad. It goes with your beautiful red hair." Vivian smiled at him fondly as, for the first time, her mind moved away from immediate things. "Promise me that when we're married sometimes you'll get mad—so we can have fights, then afterwards enjoy the fun of making up."

He said indignantly, "That's just about as daft a suggestion as the other one. And anyway, what's the point of talking about getting married when you want me to stay away from you?"

"Only for a week, Mike dear. Just one week; that's all. Please come and sit down. And listen to me—please!" As Mike took her hand, she went on, "Don't you understand, darling? I want to be sure—sure for my own sake as much as for yours."

"But sure of what?" On Mike Seddons's cheeks there were two points of high colour.

She said levelly, "Sure that you really love me."

"Of course I love you." He asked vehemently, "Haven't I said that I want us to marry—as we arranged to before"—he hesitated—"before this happened? Even your mother and father are in favour of it. They've accepted me; why can't you?"

"Oh, but I do accept you, Mike. Gratefully and gladly. Whatever happens, I don't believe there could ever be anything quite the same again; at any rate"—her voice faltered—"not for me."

"Then why . . . ?"

"Whatever you may say, Mike, I'm not the same girl you met the first time we saw each other. I can't be, ever again." She went on softly, intensely, "That's why I have to be sure—sure that you love me for what I am and not for what I was. Don't you see, darling, if we're

going to spend the rest of our lives together, I couldn't bear to think—later on—that you married me out of pity. I know you think it isn't true, and perhaps it isn't; and I hope it isn't—with all my heart. But, Mike, you're kind and generous, and you might even be doing this for that reason without admitting it to yourself."

"I know my reason." He took her hands gently, their faces close. "I know that I love you—whole or in part, yesterday, today, or tomorrow. And I know that I want to marry you—without doubts, without pity, without waiting one day longer than we have to."

"Then do this one thing for me—*because* you love me. Go away from me now, and don't come back to see me for one week—seven whole days. In that time think of everything—of me, what our life would be like together; how it would be for you—living with a cripple; the things we couldn't share and those we could. Then come back and tell me, and, if you're still sure, I promise that I'll never question you again. It's just seven days, darling—seven days out of both our lives. It isn't very much."

"Damn it, you're obstinate. I'll do it for four days—no more."

Vivian shook her head. "Six—no less."

"Make it five," he said, "and you've got a deal."

She hesitated and Mike said, "It's positively my best offer."

Vivian laughed; it was the first time she had. "All right. Five days from this moment."

"Like hell from this moment!" Mike said. "Maybe ten minutes from now. First I've got a little storing up to do. For a young fellow with my hot blood five days is a long time." He moved the bedside chair closer, then reached out. It was a long kiss, passionate and tender.

THE HOSPITAL'S board-room was crowded. News of the emergency meeting had gone round swiftly. Rumours of Joe Pearson's downfall had travelled with equal speed and had been the subject of a buzz of discussion which quieted as Pearson entered.

Kent O'Donnell was already at the head of the long walnut table. Looking towards the door, he saw Lucy Grainger come in; she caught his eye and smiled slightly. Seeing Lucy was a reminder of the decision about his own future which, when all this was settled and done, he had still to face. Suddenly he realized that since this morning he had not

once thought of Denise. The hospital activity had driven all awareness of her from his mind. O'Donnell wondered how Denise would react about taking second place to medical affairs. Would she be as understanding as, say, Lucy? Fleeting as the thought was, it made him uncomfortable.

It was time for the meeting to begin, and O'Donnell rapped for silence. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I think all of us are aware that epidemics in hospitals are not unique. One might say that they are a hazard of our existence. When one considers how many diseases we harbour inside these walls, it's surprising, really, there are not more." He paused, then continued. "I have no wish to minimize what has happened, but I want us to keep a sense of proportion. Dr. Chandler, perhaps you'd be kind enough to lead off."

As O'Donnell sat down the chief of Medicine rose to his feet. "The picture so far is that we have two definite cases of typhoid and four suspected. All of the cases are hospital employees; no patients are affected—yet. Because of the number of cases it's evident that we have a typhoid carrier somewhere in the hospital.

"For the benefit of those of you who are not familiar with typhoid—and I realize there will be some, because there isn't too much of it about nowadays—I'll run over the principal early-stage symptoms. Generally speaking, there is a rising fever, chills, and a slow pulse. There's also a low blood count and, naturally, the characteristic rose spots. In addition to all that, a patient will probably complain of a dull headache, no appetite and general aching. Some patients may say they're drowsy in the daytime and that they're restless at night. One thing to look out for also is bronchitis; that's quite common with typhoid, and you may encounter nose-bleed too. And, of course, a tender, swollen spleen."

Dr. Chandler sat down. O'Donnell asked, "Any questions?"

Lucy Grainger asked, "Are typhoid shots being arranged?"

"Yes," Chandler said, "for all employees and staff, also patients who are well enough to have them."

Dr. Rufus asked, "What about kitchen arrangements?"

O'Donnell said, "If you don't mind, we'll come to that shortly. At this point is there anything more medically?" He looked round; there was a shaking of heads. "Very well, then. We'll hear from Pathology." He announced quietly, "Dr. Pearson." There was a hush as eyes turned

curiously to where, half-way down the long table, Joe Pearson sat. Since entering he had remained quite still, his eyes fixed directly ahead. For once he had no cigar lighted, and the effect was like the absence of a familiar trademark. Slowly the old pathologist rose to his feet and his eyes swept the board-room. Then, looking directly at O'Donnell, he said, "This epidemic should not have happened. Nor would it, if Pathology had been alert to a breakdown in hygiene precautions. It is the responsibility of my department, and therefore my own responsibility, that this neglect occurred."

Again a silence. It was as if history had been made. In this room so many times Joe Pearson had charged others with error and misjudgment. Now he stood himself—accuser and accused. O'Donnell wondered if he should interrupt. He decided not. Again Pearson looked about him. Then he said slowly, "Having allocated some of the blame, we must now prevent the outbreak going farther." He glanced across the table at Harry Tomaselli. "The administrator, the heads of departments and I have formulated certain procedures to be carried out at once."

Now Pearson paused, and when he resumed his voice was stronger. It was almost as if in this moment the old man were providing a glimpse of what he had been like long ago—intense, earnest, competent.

"The immediate problem," Pearson said, "is to locate the source of infection. Because of the failure to check food handlers properly over the past six months we must suspect food as a means of contamination and should begin our search there. For this reason there must be a medical inspection of all food handlers before the next hospital meal is served. That gives us two and three-quarter hours. In that time every employee who has any part in the preparation and serving of hospital food is to be given a thorough medical check. Facilities are being set up now in the outpatient clinics. As soon as we are finished here, Dr. Coleman will give you your assignment to a specific room."

Gesturing towards the chief dietitian, Pearson said, "Mrs. Straughan is arranging to assemble all the people concerned. That means ninety-five people to be examined within the time we have. When you make these examinations, by the way, remember that the typhoid carrier—and we are assuming that there is a carrier—probably has none of the symptoms Dr. Chandler described. What you should look for particularly is any lack of personal cleanliness.

"Of course, we are all aware that medical check-ups will not give us the whole story. The chances are we won't find the individual we're looking for that way. Most likely the major work will come in the labs as soon as the medicals are completed. All the people you examine are to be told that stool samples must be in the hospital by tomorrow morning. The labs are being set up now to cope with all the cultures we shall be doing. Of course, it will take us a few days—two or three at least—to handle all those samples." With that he sat down.

Bill Rufus asked, "What's our policy to be on admissions?"

O'Donnell said, "As from this moment we've stopped admissions. We're hoping Pathology can track down the source of infection quickly, and then we'll review our admissions policy again. Anything else?"

There were no more questions.

O'Donnell closed the file which had been open in front of him. "Very well, ladies and gentlemen, I suggest we get started." Then, as chairs scraped back and conversation began, he asked Pearson, "Joe, could I have a word with you?"

Together they crossed to a window. O'Donnell said quietly, making sure his voice did not carry, "Joe, naturally you'll remain in charge of Pathology during this outbreak. But I think I must make clear to you that, concerning other things, nothing has changed."

Pearson nodded. "Yes," he said, "I'd already thought that."

LIKE A GENERAL appraising his forces ahead of battle, Dr. Joseph Pearson surveyed the Pathology laboratory. With him were Coleman, McNeil, Bannister and Alexander. Bannister and Alexander, acting on earlier instructions, had cleared the laboratory of all but immediate, essential work.

When Pearson had completed his inspection he addressed Roger McNeil. "Dr. McNeil, your job for the next few days will be to keep the lab. clear of non-essential work. Check all routine requisitions coming in and decide how many of them should have priority and which can be postponed, at least for a day or two. You yourself will have to take care of all surgical reports. Process those which appear urgent and accumulate anything that can wait. If there's any diagnosis about which you're not absolutely sure, call Dr. Coleman or myself."

"Right. I'll check with the office now." McNeil went out.

To the others Pearson said, "We shall use a separate plate for each culture. I don't want to take the risk of putting several cultures together, then having one overgrow the others." He asked Alexander, "Do we have sufficient MacConkey's medium ready to handle close to a hundred cultures?"

John Alexander was pale and his eyes were red-rimmed. He had returned from Elizabeth only half an hour before. Nevertheless he responded promptly. "No," he said, "I doubt if we've more than a couple of dozen. Normally that's several days supply."

When he had spoken, realizing that his reaction to a question about the lab. had sprung from habit, John Alexander wondered what his own feelings were towards Dr. Pearson. He supposed he should hate this old man whose negligence had caused his son's death, and perhaps later on he would. But for now there was only a dull, deep aching and a sense of melancholy. For the time being he would try to lose himself in the work that was facing them all.

"Well, then," Pearson said, "will you work in the media kitchen and stay with it until all the plates are ready for use? We must have them all by the end of the day."

"I'll get started." Alexander followed McNeil out.

Now Pearson was thinking aloud. "We shall have, say, a hundred cultures. Assume that fifty per cent will be lactose positive, leaving the other fifty per cent to be investigated further; it shouldn't be more than that." He glanced at Coleman for confirmation.

"I'd agree." Coleman nodded.

"All right then; we shall need ten sugar tubes to a culture. That means five hundred subcultures." Turning to Bannister, Pearson asked, "How many sugar tubes are ready—clean and sterilized?"

Bannister considered. "Probably a hundred and fifty."

"Then order three hundred and fifty more. Call the supply house and say we want them delivered today, and no excuses. When you've done that, begin preparing the tubes in sets of ten. Check your sugar supplies too. Remember you'll need glucose, lactose, dulcitol, sucrose, mannitol, maltose, xylose, arabinose, rhamnose, and one tube for indole production."

Pearson had rattled off the names without hesitation. With the ghost of a smile he said to Bannister, "You'll find the list and table of reactions

for *Salmonella typhi* on page sixty-six of laboratory standing orders. All right, get moving." Bannister scurried to the telephone.

Turning to David Coleman, Pearson asked, "Can you think of anything I've forgotten?"

Coleman shook his head. "I can't think of a thing." The old man's swift and thorough grasp of the situation had left him both surprised and impressed.

"In that case," Pearson said, "let's go and have coffee. It may be the last chance we'll have for quite a few days."

BACK IN his office, Kent O'Donnell permitted himself to think, for the first time with any degree of perspective, of the day's events: the death of the child, Pearson's firing, the outbreak of typhoid. So much, it seemed, had broken loose at once. Was this the sign of general disintegration? Had they all been guilty of a sense of complacency? He thought: We were all so sure that this régime was better than the last. We believed we were progressing, but we have failed ignominiously. After today there must be many changes. We must plug those gaps already exposed, and others we will uncover by diligent searching. There was so much to do. There must be more self-criticism, more self-examination. Let today, O'Donnell thought, stand as a beacon: a cross of sorrow, a signal of a new beginning. He began to plan, his brain functioning swiftly.

The telephone rang sharply. It was Denise, and her voice had the same soft huskiness that had attracted him before. "Kent darling," she said, "I want you to come to New York this next week-end. I've invited some people for Friday night and I intend to show you off."

He hesitated only a moment. Then he said, "I'm terribly sorry, Denise—I won't be able to make it."

"But you *must* come." Her voice was insistent. "I've sent out the invitations."

"I'm afraid you don't understand. We have an epidemic here. I have to stay until it's cleared up."

"But you said you'd come, dearest—whenever I called you." There was the slightest hint of petulance.

He answered, "Unfortunately I didn't know that this would happen."

"But you're in charge of the hospital. Surely, just for a day or two,

you can make someone else responsible." It was obvious that Denise had no intention of understanding.

He said quietly, "I'm afraid not."

There was a silence at the other end of the line. Then Denise said lightly, "I did warn you, Kent—I'm a very possessive person."

He started to say, "Denise dear, please—" then stopped.

"Is that really your final answer?" The voice on the phone was still soft, almost caressing.

"It has to be," he said. "I'm sorry." He added, "I'll call you, Denise—just as soon as I can get away."

"Yes," she said, "do that, Kent. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he answered, then thoughtfully replaced the phone.

IT WAS MIDMORNING—the second day of the typhoid outbreak.

The specimens, contained in small cardboard cups with lids, were set out in rows on the centre table of the Pathology laboratory. Each was identified as to source, and Pearson, seated on a wooden chair at one end of the table, was adding a lab. serial number and preparing report sheets on which the culture results would be recorded later.

As Pearson completed the preliminary paper work, he passed each specimen behind him to where Coleman and Alexander, working side by side, were preparing the culture plates. Bannister, at a side table, was handling other orders on the laboratory which McNeil—now enthroned in the Pathology office—had decided could not be delayed.

Alexander turned to Coleman and said quietly, conscious of Pearson across the room, "Doctor, there's something I wanted to tell you."

"What is it?"

"I . . . that is, we . . . have decided to take your advice. I'm going to apply for medical school."

"I'm glad." Coleman spoke with genuine feeling. "I'm sure it will turn out well."

"What will turn out well?" It was Pearson, his head lifted, watching.

Coleman said matter-of-factly, "John's just told me he's decided to apply for medical school."

"Oh." Pearson looked at Alexander sharply. He asked, "How will you afford it?"

"My wife can work, for one thing, Doctor. And then I thought I

might get some lab. work out of school hours; a lot of medical students do." Alexander paused, then, glancing at Coleman, he added, "I don't imagine it will be easy. But we think it will be worth it."

"I see." Pearson seemed about to say something else, then hesitated. Finally he asked, "How is your wife?"

Quietly Alexander answered, "She'll be all right. Thank you."

For a moment there was silence. Then Pearson said slowly, "I wish there was something I could say to you." He paused. "But I don't suppose words would do very much good."

Alexander met the old man's eyes. "No, Dr. Pearson," he said, "I don't believe they would."

ALONE IN her hospital room, Vivian had been trying to read a novel, but her mind would not register the words. She sighed and put the book down. At this moment she wished desperately that she had not forced Mike into promising to stay away. Her eyes went to the telephone; if she called he would come. Did it really matter—this silly idea of hers of a few days separation for them both to think things over? After all, they were in love; wasn't that enough? Should she call? She was on the point of picking up the receiver when her sense of purpose won. No! She would wait. This was the second day. The other three would go quickly, then she would have Mike to herself—for good and all.

IN THE house-staff common-room, off duty for half an hour, Mike Seddons lay back in one of the deep leather arm-chairs. He was doing exactly what Vivian had told him—thinking of what it would be like living with a wife who had only one leg.

Chapter 15

IT WAS early afternoon. Four days had gone by since the initial cases of typhoid in Three Counties Hospital had been reported. Now, in the administrator's office, serious-faced and silent, Orden Brown, the board chairman, and Kent O'Donnell were listening to Harry Tomaselli speaking on the telephone. "I understand," the administrator said. There was a pause, then he continued, "If that becomes necessary we shall be ready. At five o'clock then. Good-bye." He replaced the phone.

"Well?" Orden Brown asked impatiently.

"The City Health Department is giving us until this evening," Tomaselli said quietly. "If we've failed to locate the typhoid carrier by then we shall be required to close the kitchens. And that, of course, will have practically the same effect as closing the hospital."

Orden Brown asked, "Is there any news at all from Pathology?"

"No." O'Donnell shook his head. "They're still working."

"I can't understand it!" The board chairman was more disturbed than O'Donnell had ever seen him. "Four days and ten typhoid cases now in the hospital—and we still haven't come up with the source!"

"There's no question it's a big job for the lab.," O'Donnell said. "Joe Pearson told me they expect to be through with all their cultures by midmorning tomorrow. If the typhoid carrier is among the food handlers, they'll have to have traced him by then."

He appealed to Tomaselli. "Can't you persuade the public-health people to hold off—at least until midday tomorrow?"

The administrator shook his head. "They've given us four days already; they won't wait any longer. The city health officer was here this morning; he's returning at five o'clock. If there's nothing to report by then I'm afraid we'll have to accept their ruling."

THE TENSION in the laboratory was equalled only by the tiredness of the three men working there.

Dr. Joseph Pearson was haggard, his eyes red-rimmed, weariness written in the slowness of his movements. For the past four days and three nights he had remained at the hospital, snatching only a few hours of sleep on a bed which he had had moved into the Pathology office. Only for one period of several hours on the second day had he been missing from Pathology, with no one knowing where he had gone and Coleman unable to locate him. Subsequently Pearson had reappeared, offering no explanation for his absence, and had continued his supervision of the cultures and subcultures.

Now Pearson asked, "How many have we done?"

Dr. Coleman checked a list. "Eighty-nine," he said. "That leaves another five in incubation which we'll have tomorrow morning."

David Coleman was conscious of an oppressive weariness which made him wonder if his own endurance would last as long as the older man's.

Unlike Pearson, Coleman had slept at his own apartment on each of the three nights, leaving the laboratory well after midnight and returning about six the following morning.

Early as he had been, though, in arriving, he had preceded John Alexander on only one occasion, and then by a mere few minutes. The other times the young technologist had already been occupied at one of the lab. benches, working—as he had since the beginning—like a precisely geared machine, his movements accurate and economic, his written record of each test stage recorded in neat, legible lettering.

David Coleman wondered whether his throwing himself so intensely into this endeavour was proving an outlet for some of his personal grief. Coleman had resolved, as soon as this present crisis was over, to have a long talk with Alexander about his intention to enrol at medical school. There was a good deal of advice and guidance he could offer the younger man, pitfalls which he might help Alexander to avoid.

The telephone bell rang and Pearson answered it. "Yes?" He listened, then said, "No; nothing yet. I keep telling you—I'll call as soon as we find anything." He replaced the instrument.

John Alexander, succumbing to a sudden tiredness, completed an entry on a data sheet, then dropped into a straight-back laboratory chair. Momentarily he closed his eyes.

From alongside, David Coleman said, "Why don't you take an hour off, John—go upstairs and stay with your wife for a while?"

Alexander got to his feet again. He knew that if he remained seated too long he could easily fall asleep. "I'll do one more series," he said, "then I think I will." Taking a rack of subcultures from the incubator, he collected a fresh data sheet and began to line up the ten sugar tubes he was about to check. He glanced at the laboratory wall clock and noted with surprise that another day was running out. The time was ten minutes to five.

O'DONNELL REPLACED the phone. Answering Tomaselli's unspoken question, he said, "Joe Pearson says there's nothing new."

In the administrator's office there was a silence, both men bleakly aware of the implications of this latest lack of news.

The hospital was already grinding to a halt. Since early afternoon the plan for contraction of patient service, made necessary by the impending

shutdown of the hospital kitchens, had been going steadily into effect. Commencing with breakfast tomorrow, one hundred meals for patients on regular diet would be prepared by two local restaurants and would be delivered to the hospital for seriously ill patients who could not be moved. Of the remaining patients, as many as possible were being discharged to their homes, while others, for whom hospital care was still essential, were being transferred to other institutions in and around Burlington. For the first time in its forty-year history Three Counties Hospital was turning the sick and the injured away from its doors.

There was a light tap, and Orden Brown entered Tomaselli's office. He asked, "Are the city health authorities here yet?"

"Not yet," Tomaselli answered. "We're expecting them now."

Brown said quietly, "If you don't mind, I'll wait with you." He turned to O'Donnell. "Kent, this isn't important now, but I'll tell you while I think of it. I've had a call from Eustace Swayne. When all this is over he would like you to go and see him."

For an instant the effrontery of the request left O'Donnell speechless. It was obvious why Eustace Swayne wanted to talk with him: despite everything, the old man intended to use his money and influence to intercede for his friend Joe Pearson. O'Donnell said explosively, "To hell with Eustace Swayne and all his works!"

"May I remind you," Brown said icily, "that you are speaking of a member of the hospital board. Whatever your disagreements, he is entitled to be treated with courtesy."

O'Donnell faced Orden Brown, his eyes blazing. Very well, he thought, if this is the showdown, then let's have it. I've finished with hospital politics—for good and as from now.

At that moment a girl's voice said on the intercom, "Mr. Tomaselli, the public-health officer has just arrived."

It was three minutes to five.

A SMALL GROUP threaded its way through the corridors of Three Counties. Led by O'Donnell, it included Brown, Tomaselli, Dr. Norbert Ford, the city health officer, and Mrs. Straughan, who had arrived at the administration department as they were leaving.

Now that his initial anger was over, the chief of Surgery was relieved that the interruption of a few minutes ago had prevented a major quarrel

between himself and Orden Brown. The board chairman had, after all, done no more than relay a message; O'Donnell's real quarrel was with Eustace Swayne, and he resolved to meet the old tycoon face to face as soon as this present business was over.

At the Pathology laboratory O'Donnell handled introductions. The health officer asked, "Have you come up with anything?"

"Not yet." Pearson gestured round the lab. "As you can see, we're still working."

O'Donnell said, "Joe, I thought you should know. Dr. Ford has ordered the closing of our kitchens."

"Today?" There was disbelief in Pearson's voice. "But that's ridiculous!" This was the old aggressive, belligerent Pearson. He stormed on, "Why, man alive, we'll be working all night, and every subculture will be finished by midday tomorrow. If there's a carrier, all the chances are we'll have learned who it is."

"I'm sorry," Dr. Ford said. "We can't take that chance."

"But closing the kitchens means closing the hospital," Pearson fumed. "Surely you can wait until morning."

"I'm afraid not." The health officer was polite but firm. "The city simply cannot afford the possibility of a wider epidemic."

Harry Tomaselli put in, "We're serving the evening meal, Joe, and that will be the last. We're sending home all the patients we can and transferring most of the others."

There was silence. Pearson's face muscles were working. His deep-set, red-rimmed eyes seemed close to tears. His voice near a whisper, he said, "I never thought I'd see the day"

As the group turned away O'Donnell added quietly, "To tell the truth, Joe, neither did I."

They had reached the door when John Alexander announced, "I have it."

They all turned. Pearson asked sharply, "You have what?"

"A definite typhoid." Alexander pointed to the row of sugar tubes on which he had been working.

"Let me see!" Almost at a run, Pearson crossed the laboratory. "Call off the list," he said.

John picked up the tabulated chart of biochemical reactions of bacteria in sugar tubes and prepared to read.

Pearson picked up the first tube. He called out, "Glucose."

"Acid formation, but no gas."

Pearson nodded. He selected a second tube. "Lactose."

"No acid, no gas," Alexander read.

"Right." A pause. "Dulcitol."

Again Alexander read, "No acid, no gas."

"Sucrose."

"No acid, no gas." The tension in the room was mounting.

Pearson took another tube. "Mannitol."

"Acid formation, but no gas."

"Correct." Another. "Maltose."

"Acid, but no gas."

Pearson nodded. Six down, four to go. Now he said, "Xylose."

Once more Alexander read, "Acid, but no gas."

Seven. "Arabinose."

"Either acid but no gas or no reaction at all."

Pearson announced, "No reaction."

Eight. Two more. "Rhamnose."

"No reaction."

Pearson looked at the tube. He said softly, "No reaction."

One to go. From the last tube Pearson read, "Indole production."

"Negative," Alexander said, and replaced the book.

Pearson turned to the others. He said, "There's no question. This is the typhoid carrier."

"Who is it?" The administrator was first to ask.

Pearson turned over a dish. "Number seventy-two."

Coleman had already reached for a ledger with a list in his own handwriting. He announced, "Charlotte Burgess."

Mrs. Straughan said quickly, "She works on the serving counter."

As if by instinct, all eyes swung to the clock. It was seven minutes past five. Mrs. Straughan said urgently, "The dinner! They're beginning to serve the evening meal!"

"Let's get to the dining-room fast!" As he spoke, Harry Tomaselli was already at the door.

NURSE PENFIELD was about to enter the cafeteria when she saw the group bearing down towards her.

Passing through the cafeteria entrance, Harry Tomaselli slowed his pace. "I want this done quickly and quietly," he told Mrs. Straughan. Together they entered the kitchens through a service doorway.

O'Donnell beckoned to Nurse Penfield. "Come with me, please. I'd like you to help us."

What happened next was done with swiftness and precision. One moment an elderly woman was serving at the cafeteria counter. The next, Mrs. Straughan had taken her arm and steered her into the diet office at the back. O'Donnell told the bewildered woman, "One moment, please," and motioned Nurse Penfield to remain with her.

"Take the food she was serving and incinerate it," he instructed Mrs. Straughan. "Get back any you can that's already been served. Remove any dishes she may have touched and boil them."

The chief dietitian went out to the serving counter. In a few minutes O'Donnell's instructions had been followed and the cafeteria line was moving once more. Only a few individuals closest to the scene were aware of what had occurred.

In the office at the back O'Donnell told the woman kitchen worker,



"Mrs. Burgess, I must ask you to regard yourself as a patient in the hospital." He added kindly, "Try not to be alarmed; everything will be explained to you." To Nurse Penfield he said, "Take this patient to the isolation ward. She's to have contact with no one. I'll call Dr. Chandler and he'll issue instructions."

Gently Elaine Penfield led the frightened woman away.

Mrs. Straughan asked curiously, "What happens to her now, Dr. O.?"

"She'll be well looked after," O'Donnell said. "She'll stay in isolation, and the house physicians will study her for a while. Sometimes, you know, a typhoid carrier may have an infected gall bladder, and if that's the case she'll probably be operated on."

On the diet-office telephone Harry Tomaselli was telling an assistant, "That's what I said: cancel everything—transfers, discharges other than normal, catered meals, the whole works. And when you've done that you can call the Admitting office." The administrator grinned across the desk at O'Donnell. "Tell them that Three Counties Hospital is back in business."

Tomaselli hung up the phone. "By the way, Mrs. Straughan," he said, "there hasn't been time to tell you before, but you're getting your new dishwashers. The board has approved the expenditure and the contract has been made. I expect the work will begin next week."

The dietitian nodded; obviously the information was something she had anticipated. Now her mind had moved ahead to other things. "There's something else I'd like to show you while you're here, Mr. T. I need my refrigeration enlarged." She eyed the administrator sternly. "I hope this time it won't require an epidemic to prove my point."

The administrator sighed and rose to his feet. He asked O'Donnell, "Do you have any more problems today?"

"Not today," O'Donnell answered. "Tomorrow, though, there's one item of business I intend to deal with personally."

He was thinking of Eustace Swayne.

IN THE GLOOMY, lofty hall, a manservant took O'Donnell's overcoat and hat. "Mr. Swayne is a little tired today, sir," he said. "He asked if you would mind if he received you in his bedroom."

"I don't mind," O'Donnell said. It occurred to him that the bedroom might be an appropriate place for what he had to say. If Swayne had

apoplexy as a result, at least it would be a handy place to treat him. He followed the servant up the wide, curved stairway, then down a corridor. At a heavy, studded door the man tapped lightly and lifted a wrought-iron latch. He ushered O'Donnell into Swayne's spacious bedroom.

Swayne was propped up by pillows in a huge four-poster bed, a monogrammed dressing-gown draped round his shoulders. As he approached, O'Donnell noticed how frail the old man had become since the night of the dinner with the Orden Browns and Denise.

"Thank you for coming," Swayne said. His voice, too, was weaker than before. He motioned his visitor to a chair beside the bed.

As he seated himself O'Donnell said, "I heard you wanted to see me." In his own mind he was already revising some of the forthright statements he had planned to make. This was an ailing old man.

"Joe Pearson has been to see me," Swayne said. "Three days ago, I think it was."

"Yes," O'Donnell answered, "I imagined he would."

"He told me that he's leaving the hospital." The old man's voice sounded weary; there was no hint so far of the denunciation O'Donnell had expected. "When Joe came to see me," Swayne said, "he made two requests. The first was that my donation to the hospital building fund should have no stipulations attached. I have agreed."

There was a pause, O'Donnell silent as the significance of the words sank in. The old man went on, "The second request was a personal one. You have an employee at the hospital—his name is Alexander, I believe. They lost a child?"

O'Donnell nodded wonderingly.

"Joe Pearson asked that I pay the boy's way through medical school. I can do it, of course—quite easily. Money at least has a few remaining uses." Swayne reached for a thick Manila envelope which had been lying on the quilt. "I have already instructed my lawyers. There will be a fund—enough to take care of fees and for him and his wife to live comfortably. Afterwards, if he chooses to specialize, there will be money for that too." The old man paused, as if tired by speaking. Then he continued, "What I have in mind now is something more permanent. Later there will be others—I suppose equally deserving. I would like the fund to continue and to be administered by the Three Counties' medical board. I shall insist on only one condition." Swayne looked squarely at

O'Donnell. He said defiantly, "The fund will be named the Joseph Pearson Medical Endowment. Do you object?"

Moved and ashamed, O'Donnell answered, "Sir, far from objecting, in my opinion it will be one of the finest things you have ever done."

"PLEASE TELL me the truth, Mike," Vivian said. "I want to know."

They faced each other—Vivian in the hospital bed, Mike Seddons standing, apprehensively, beside it. Her eyes searched his face, fear nudging her, instinct telling what her mind refused to know.

"Vivian," Mike said, and she could see him trembling, "I've got to talk to you."

There was no answer, only Vivian's steady gaze meeting his own. His lips were dry; he felt his heart pounding. His instinct was to turn and run. Instead he stood, groping for words which refused to come.

"I think I know what you want to say, Mike." Vivian's voice was flat; it seemed drained of emotion. "You don't want to marry me. I'd be a burden to you—now, like this."

He said urgently, imploringly, "Please listen to me, Vivian—hear me out! It isn't that simple . . ." Again his speech faltered.

For three days he had sought the right words and phrases to meet this moment, knowing that whatever form they took the effect would be the same. In the days since their last meeting Mike Seddons had probed his soul and conscience. What he had found there had left him with disgust and self-contempt, but he had emerged with truth. He knew with certainty that a marriage between himself and Vivian would never succeed—not because of her inadequacy, but through his own.

In moments of searching self-examination he had forced himself to consider situations the two of them might meet together. He had seen them entering a crowded room—himself young, virile, unimpaired; Vivian on his arm, moving slowly, awkwardly, perhaps with a stick, and only as an artificial limb allowed. He had seen himself dive through surf, or lie on a beach in the sun, with Vivian dressed decorously, sharing none of it because a prosthesis was ugly when exposed and, if removed, made her a freak—an object for pitying or averted eyes.

And more than this. Overcoming every reluctance and instinctive decency, he had let himself consider sex. Would there be fulfilment—with a body no longer whole? Mike Seddons sweated. He had plumbed

the depths and found his own reflection. Vivian said, "You needn't explain, Mike." This time her voice was choked.

"But I want to! I've got to! There are so many things we both have to think of." Now the words came quickly, tumbling out in an eager effort to make Vivian understand the agony of mind he had suffered. He needed her understanding.

He started to say, "Look, Vivian; you'll be better off"

He found her eyes regarding him. He had never noticed before how steady and direct they were. "Please don't lie, Mike," she said. "I think you'd better go."

He knew it was no good. All that he wanted now was to get away from here, not to have to meet Vivian's eyes. But still he hesitated. He asked, "What will you do?"

"I really don't know. To tell the truth, I haven't thought much about it." Vivian's voice was steady, but it betrayed the effort she was making. "Perhaps I'll go on in nursing, if they'll have me. Of course, I really don't know if I'm cured, and if I'm not, how long I've got. That's so, isn't it, Mike?"

He had the grace to lower his eyes. At the doorway he looked back for the last time. "Good-bye, Vivian," he said.

She tried to answer, but her self-control had been taxed too long.

"OH, DR. COLEMAN! Do come in." Kent O'Donnell got up courteously from his desk as the young pathologist entered the room. Coleman had been in the Pathology laboratory when O'Donnell's message had reached him. Instinct told him that what was to follow would be a turning point in his life. O'Donnell moved to the office window. He stood with his back to it, the morning sun behind him. "I imagine you've heard," he said, "that Dr. Pearson has resigned."

"Yes, I'd heard." Coleman answered quietly, then to his own surprise he heard himself saying, "You know, of course, these past few days he hasn't spared himself. He's been here day and night."

"Yes, I know." O'Donnell regarded the glowing tip of his cigarette. "But it doesn't change anything. You realize that?"

Coleman knew that the chief of Surgery was right. "No," he said, "I don't suppose it does."

"Joe has expressed a wish to leave at once," O'Donnell continued.

"It means there will be an immediate vacancy here for a director of Pathology. Will you accept?"

For a second David Coleman hesitated. This was the thing he had coveted—a department of his own; freedom to reorganize, to mobilize the new aids of science, to practise good medicine, and to make pathology count as he knew it truly could.

Then fear struck him. Suddenly he was appalled at the awesome responsibility he would have to hold. There would be no one senior to relieve him of decisions; the ultimate choice—the final diagnosis—would be his alone. Was he ready? He could continue as a second-in-command for several years more. After that there would be plenty of time to move ahead. Then he knew that there was no escaping, that this moment had been moving towards him ever since his arrival at Three Counties Hospital.

"Yes," he said. "If it's offered to me, I shall accept."

"I can tell you that it will be offered." O'Donnell smiled. "Now would you tell me something?" He paused: what was to be said next would be important to them both. Finally he asked, "Will you tell me what your attitude is—to medicine and to this hospital?"

"It's hard to put into words," Coleman said slowly. "I suppose the real thing is that all of us—doctors, the hospital, medical technology—exist only for one thing: for healing the sick. I believe we forget this sometimes. We become absorbed in medicine, science, better hospitals; and we forget that all these things have only one reason for existence—people. People who need us, who come to medicine for help." He stopped. "I've put it clumsily."

"No," O'Donnell said. "You've put it very well." He had a sense of triumph and of hope. Instinct had not belied him; he had chosen well. The two of them would be good together. They would go on and build Three Counties, their aims and feelings shared. "One more thing. How do you feel about Joe Pearson and the way he's leaving?"

"I'm not sure," David Coleman said. It was true. A week ago he had looked on Pearson as a near-senile incompetent. Since then, Pearson had handled the typhoid outbreak competently, but that, after all, was routine; and the situation being what it was, it was understandable that Pearson should have wanted to rise to it well.

"It's not such a bad thing to be unsure sometimes." O'Donnell smiled

again. "There are some things I think you should know about Pearson. I've been talking with some of the older men on the staff; they've told me incidents, things I didn't know about." He paused. "Joe Pearson has done a great deal for this hospital in thirty-two years—things that are mostly forgotten now. He started the blood bank, you know. It's strange to think of it now, but there was a lot of opposition at the time. Then he worked for the formation of the tissue committee; I'm told a good many staff men fought him bitterly on that. Joe did some investigative work, too—on the cause and incidence of thyroid cancer. Most of it's generally accepted now, but few people remember that it came from Joe."

"I didn't know," Coleman said. "Thank you for telling me."

"Well, these things get forgotten. Joe brought a lot of new things into the lab., too—new tests, new equipment. Unfortunately there came a time when he didn't do new things any more. He let himself vegetate and get in a rut. It happens sometimes."

Suddenly Coleman thought of his own father, of his own suspicion that the sensitized blood which killed the Alexander child had been the result of a transfusion his father had given years before. "Yes," he said. "I suppose it does."

O'Donnell said softly, "It's a good thing for all of us to have compassion. You never know whether some day you'll need it yourself."

LUCY GRAINGER said, "Kent, you look tired."

It was early afternoon, and O'Donnell had paused in a main-floor corridor. Unnoticed, she had stopped beside him.

Dear Lucy, he thought—unchanged, warm and tender. Had he ever really considered leaving Burlington and marrying Denise? At the moment it all seemed far away—a nostalgic interlude that now was nothing more. Here was where he belonged; in this place his destiny lay. He took her arm. "Lucy," he said, "let's meet soon. There's a lot we have to talk about."

"All right." She smiled. "You may take me to dinner tomorrow."

Side by side, they moved on down the corridor, and it was somehow reassuring to have her beside him. There came to him a sense of certainty that for both of them there was much that was good ahead. In the end, they would find their future together.

DAVID COLEMAN entered the Pathology office and found Pearson emptying the contents of his desk drawers. "It's a funny thing," he said, "how much junk you can accumulate in thirty-two years."

For a moment Coleman watched. Then he said, "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about," Pearson answered gruffly. He closed the last drawer and put papers in a case. "I hear you're getting a new job. Congratulations."

Coleman said, and meant it, "I wish it could have been some other way."

"Too late to worry now." Pearson snapped the locks on the case and looked round. "Well, I guess that's everything. If you find anything else you can send it with my pension cheque."

"There's something I want to tell you," Coleman said. "The student nurse—the one who had her leg amputated. I dissected the limb this morning. You were right. I was wrong. It was malignant. Osteogenic sarcoma without a doubt."

The old man paused. He gave the impression that his thoughts were far away. "I'm glad I didn't make a mistake," he said slowly, "about that anyway." He picked up an overcoat and moved to the door, then turned back. Almost diffidently he asked, "Do you mind if I give you some advice?"

Coleman shook his head. "Please do."

"You're young," Pearson said. "You're full of spice and vinegar—that's good. You're up to date, too—you know things I never did, never will now. Take my advice and try to keep it that way. It'll be tough to do; make no mistake about it." He waved towards the desk. "You'll sit in that chair and the phone will ring, and it'll be the administrator—talking about budgets. Next minute one of the lab. staff will want to leave; and you'll have to smooth that out. And the doctors will want this bit of information and that." The old man smiled thinly. "Then you'll get the salesman—the man with the unbreakable test-tube and the burner that never goes out. And when you've finished seeing him there'll be another and another and another. At the end of a day you'll wonder what happened to it and what you've accomplished, what you've achieved."

Pearson stopped and then went on, "That's the way the next day can go, and the next, until you find a year has slipped by, and another, and

another. And while you're doing all this you'll send other people to take courses to hear about the new things in medicine—because you can't take time off to go yourself. And you'll stop investigation and research; and because you work so hard, you'll be tired at night, and you won't feel like reading textbooks. And then suddenly, one day, you'll find everything you knew is out of date. When it's too late to change."

Emotion-charged, Pearson's voice faltered. He put a hand on Coleman's arm. He said imploringly, "Listen to an old man who made the mistake of falling behind. Don't let it happen to you! Lock yourself in a cupboard if you have to! Get away from the phone and the files and paper, and read and learn and keep up to date! Then they can never touch you, never say, 'He's all washed up; he belongs to yesterday.' Because you'll know as much as they do—and more." The voice trailed off and Pearson turned away.

"I shall try to remember," Coleman said. He added gently, "I'll come with you to the door."

They climbed the stairs from Pathology, and on the hospital's main floor the bustle of early-evening activity was just beginning. A nurse passed them carrying a diet tray, her starched uniform swishing; then a wheel-chair with a middle-aged man, one leg in a cast, holding a pair of crutches like oars withdrawn into a boat. A Women's Auxiliary worker propelled a trolley with magazines. A man clutching a bouquet of flowers headed for the lifts. It was the hospital world: a living organism.

Pearson was looking about him. Coleman thought: Thirty-two years, and he's seeing it all, perhaps for the last time. He wondered: How will it be when my own time comes? Shall I remember this moment thirty years hence?

On the public-address system a voice announced, "Dr. David Coleman. Dr. Coleman to the Surgical floor."

"It's started," Pearson said. "It'll be a frozen section—you'd better go." He held out his hand. "Good luck."

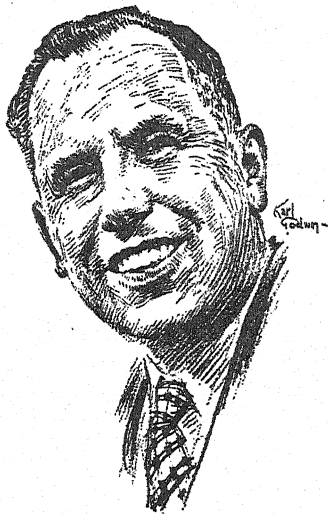
Coleman found it hard to speak. "Thank you," he said.

The old man nodded and turned away.

"Good night, Dr. Pearson." It was one of the senior nurses.

"Good night," Pearson said. Then, on the way out, he stopped under a "No Smoking" sign to light a cigar.

Arthur Hailey



ARTHUR HAILEY was born in Luton, Bedfordshire, in 1920. During the war he served as a pilot in the R.A.F. (training in Canada) and for a year was on the staff of the Air Ministry.

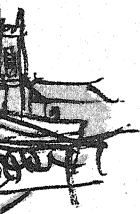
In 1947 he returned to Canada to become the editor of a technical magazine. In England he had had some success with writing articles and short stories, but at first he made little headway with Canadian publishers. Then, in 1956, while on a passenger flight, he had a day-dream, imagining the crew suddenly incapacitated and himself called upon to pilot the aircraft to a safe landing. In his spare time he turned this dream into a television play—*Flight into Danger*. It was immediately accepted by the National Broadcasting Company, and brought him international fame, winning television prizes, being filmed, and also being published as a novel in fifteen countries and ten languages.

Before writing *The Final Diagnosis*, Mr. Hailey donned a white jacket and, equipped with a tape recorder, spent weeks in several important hospitals, watching operations, post-mortems and other events of hospital life.

Named by *Time Magazine* as one of the six best television playwrights in the world, he now has to his credit eleven successful television plays and three films. He does his writing in business-like fashion, working a regular nine-to-five day at his home in Ontario, where he lives with his wife and three children.



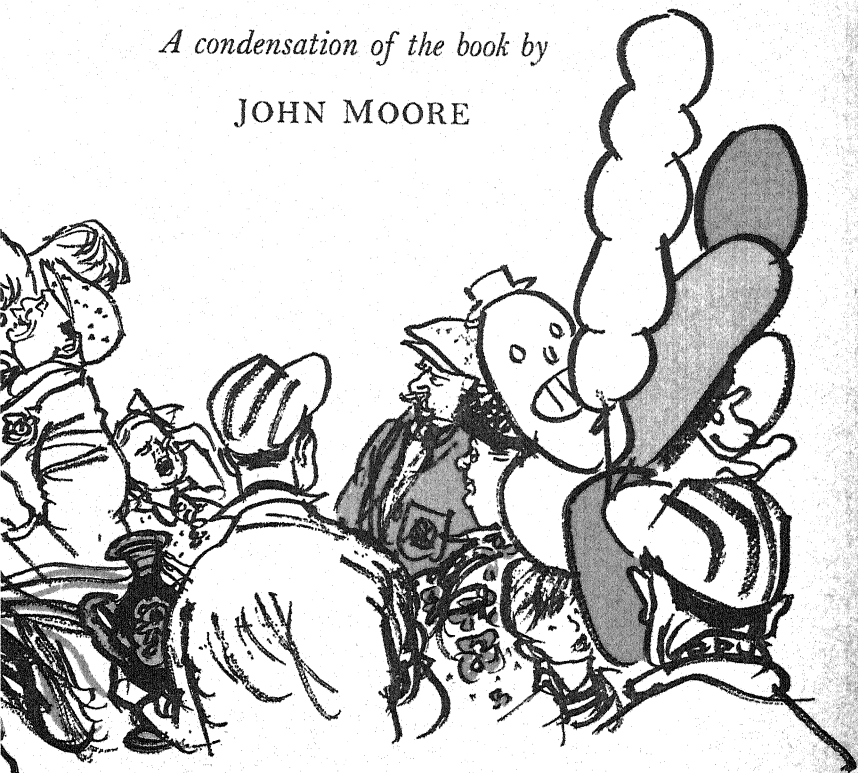
Illustrations by Francis Marshall



Jungle Girl

A condensation of the book by

JOHN MOORE



"Jungle Girl" is published by Collins, London

MOST OF THE Fair's thrill-seeking customers saw Leonora as the star of the snake-act—a bikini-clad, "death-defying Jungle Girl." But in this enchanting short novel you'll see her as one freckle-faced young sailor did—as a fairy-tale innocent untarnished by the tawdriness around her, whose fierce-looking pythons were as temperamental (and about as dangerous) as kittens.

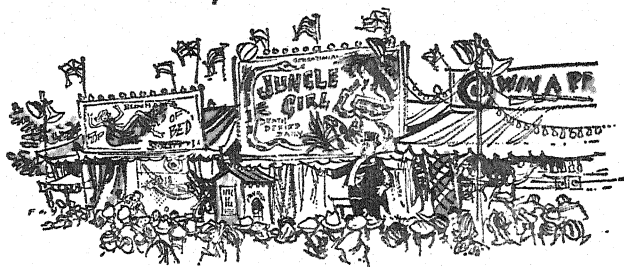
Soaring with her sea-going Galahad in a chairoplane high above the tinsel lights, Leonora breathed for the first time the sweet fresh air of freedom. And, returning to earth, she was plunged into agonizing conflict as two determined young men—and their separate worlds—engaged in battle for her guileless heart.

"A story sharp in light, shadow and colour, in which a mood is caught and held, entire and alive."

—*The Scotsman*

"Beautifully and sensitively written."

—*The Times Literary Supplement*



LEONORA closed her eyes until there was the least possible slit between the lids and played the game which she often played when she was bored or unhappy: she imagined herself to be in the Forest, which she had never seen. The lighting in her tent helped the illusion; the light bulbs were coloured green. By narrowing her eyes she could conjure up a leafy shade, and the faces of the people peering down at her became blurred until they were as clusters of pale flowers—huge orchids perhaps, like the ones which were painted on the six-foot-high advertisement board outside the booth. Leonora's idea of the Forest was founded entirely upon this painting, which showed scarlet parrots, white cockatoos and sky-blue macaws perching among the orchids. There were also bright-daubed butterflies and monkeys hanging by their tails; crocodiles yawned; lions, tigers, leopards peered out of thick foliage; and a girl, even more naked than Leonora was now, stood unconcerned among them.

It was hot in her Forest: an oil-stove cast a midsummer warmth upon her bare legs and arms and made a continuous sizzling noise as of cicadas. She could imagine other noises: rustlings in long grass, parrot-squawks, ape-chatterings. This was not difficult because the people as they walked round her pen jabbered like monkeys, uttering oo's and ah's, and Mr. Bloxham, who stood at the entrance in a top-hat and a tail-coat with a carnation in his buttonhole, had a voice as harsh as a parrot's, seeming to screech Wah-wuk-wah, wah-wuk-wah, though what he really said was, Walk up, ladies and gents, walk up all you folks an'

see the beautiful Jungle Girl defying an 'orrible death every minute.

Opening her eyes the merest fraction, Leonora looked into two others. They were lidless and unblinking, and they were poised about six inches from the tip of her nose. The pupils, elliptical like a cat's, were black as ebony within irises of golden-amber. These eyes were so hard and glittering that they looked like two precious stones set in the flat green head. Leonora gently pushed the head away, cupping it in the palm of her hand. Raising her other hand she supported a heavy coil of the leaf-green, bronze-brown-dappled beautiful body and let it slide slowly past her face, so that it filled her field of vision and she saw it as a piece of the Forest, a swaying green bough.

A woman said: "Nasty. It ain't natural. It turns me up to see 'er."

The Forest spell was broken, and Leonora looked up. Her pen was made of canvas on a framework four feet high. Over the top of the frame the turned-up woman and the other flatties stared down at her. Leonora didn't know why they were called flatties. Perhaps it was because when you saw them from a pen like hers or across the counter of a shooting gallery or from the inside of a coco-nut shy they looked flat somehow; there was no depth to them. They were simply eyes that stared and mouths that shouted at you. Anyhow Leonora had learned to call them flatties as soon as she could talk, and she always thought of them like that, neither as friends nor foes, but just flatties.

Her pen was twelve feet square and sparsely decorated with maiden-hair ferns in pots and some rather sick-looking and unjungly aspidistras. Its only furnishings, besides the oil-stove, were two cushions, on which she could lean back, and the bowl containing the snakes' water. Mr. Bloxham had bought it in a junk shop and it was inappropriately lettered FIDO. The snakes hardly ever drank the water, but a man with a beard had once complained that it was cruelty to snakes not to provide it. On the strength of his beard Mr. Bloxham deemed the man to be learned and a naturalist; and he was wary of learning and of naturalists. So was Leonora. Educated flatties were apt to sneer: "Defying death, rubbish! Perfectly harmless pythons or boas. They don't bite, they squeeze." One of them had once addressed her directly: "Your snakes don't bite, do they?"

"They do!" cried Leonora, passionate for truth, despite Mr. Bloxham's repeated warnings about arguing with flatties.

"Tush," said the naturalist; and Leonora thought the less of science ever after, because Catherine had bitten her sharply and painfully only the week before, when she was putting her away in her cage. Her bite wasn't poisonous, of course; but it was a vicious little nip. It had made Leonora squeak, and Mrs. Bloxham had put some iodine on it, because you never could tell with creepy-crawlies.

Catherine was the larger of the two snakes. From nose to tail she was five feet three, which was exactly the same length as Leonora. The male snake, Kaa, was less than four feet; and he had none of Catherine's capricious temper. He was curled round Leonora's shoulders now, and it was his eyes that had peered, or seemed to peer, into hers.

Catherine meanwhile was playing her favourite trick of trying to get as close as possible to the oil-stove, whence Leonora had to retrieve her from time to time by pulling her tail. This had the same effect as pulling a cat's tail: Catherine turned her head crossly to see what was happening and slithered back towards Leonora, who then let go of her tail. Continuing upon her course, Catherine arrived in Leonora's lap, where she would settle down until she began to feel the urge to bask in the stove's warmth again.

Leonora lay back on the cushions and tickled Kaa's throat, which seemed to give him pleasure: his head swung slowly to and fro like a pendulum. This was too much for the turned-up woman. She pushed her way past a fat man with a broad red face who had shuffled very slowly round the pen, holding everybody up, until at last he had found himself close to the exit, where he had stopped. He leaned right over the pen, and his small piggy eyes never left Leonora. "Ain't you cold?" he said at last.

She shook her head. It had to be hot for the snakes; otherwise they got sleepy and Catherine pretended to be dead, which caused mockery among the flatties who had just listened to Mr. Bloxham's hair-raising discourse. It was so hot today that the sun-tan stuff was running off Leonora's body. She hated it, because she had to scrub it off each night; but Mr. Bloxham thought it matched her better to the jungle scene. "Can't have you looking too white with them snakes," he said. "It wouldn't be artistic. It wouldn't be Right."

Towards this end he had also provided her with a bikini costume,

which did not seem to him incongruous, and save for a string of red coral beads this was all she wore. It was one of Mr. Bloxham's maxims that "in show business the less they wears the better, so long of course as they stays decent." His new girl, Ivy, who submitted three times a day to confinement in a long glass case like a coffin, where she was "frozen solid on to a block of ice," wore a bikini too, and Petula, the Tip-'em-out-of-bed Kid, was dressed in a transparent pink nightdress for the delight of those accurate marksmen who could hit the bull's-eye on the target with a wooden ball, whereupon Petula was tumbled out of a kind of hammock slung beneath.

These two shows, plus Leonora's snakes and Battling Bill's Boxing Booth, earned Mr. Bloxham a handsome living at the fairs to which he travelled regularly from April to October. But he was an ambitious man, and hankered after higher things. His dream was of tigers: not of tigers only, but tigers in conjunction with girls. For another of his maxims ran: "Animals is O.K. and nudes is O.K., but if you can mix up animals and nudes you are on to a winner." Therefore he coveted tigers, to be confined in the same large cage with nudes standing on pedestals. The only thing which prevented Mr. Bloxham from fulfilling his curious ambition was shortage of cash. Tigers were very expensive. Girls of course were always cheap.

So for the time being he had to remain content with Leonora and her snakes, and they were singularly profitable. When she first joined Mr. Bloxham's show, three months ago, Leonora had worn long black tights and the matching tops which in show business are called leotards. Her mother, who had done the same act for years and had brought Leonora up with the snakes since she was a child, had always "dressed respectable." "Else it becomes a different kind of show," she had explained. "Not artistic, not nice." Artistic had been one of her mother's favourite words; she spoke of herself as an artiste, with pride.

But Mr. Bloxham had his own ideas. After a week or two he had said, with a thoughtful glance at Leonora, "We'll have to have them black things off you, I think"; and he had bought her the bikini next day. Leonora, for her own part, didn't mind either way: flatties were flatties, remote and separate from you. But she had thought Bill would mind. Bill was Mr. Bloxham's son: Battling Bill of the Boxing Booth. In the autumn, when the fairs finished, he and Leonora were going

to be married. So Leonora had half expected that he would be against the bikini and when it turned out that he wasn't she had been, not hurt exactly, but puzzled, suddenly uncertain of the world in which she found herself. At the end of that week, late on a Saturday night, she had put the snakes away and gone into the caravan. She was still wearing a bikini, and was smeared with the sun-tan stuff. She'd put it on extra thick over the place where the tattoo was, just between her shoulder blades: BILL, and a heart with an arrow through it.

Mr. Bloxham and Bill had been counting up the takings. They were twice as good as last week's. Bill had glanced at her, and nodded at his father. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," he had said.

For Leonora, it was the first shadow of disillusion.

SHE AND BILL had been walking out for nearly a year before she joined Mr. Bloxham, and she had been just sixteen when she first watched Bill in the boxing booth, stripped to the waist, lithe as a leopard, the muscles rippling across his broad shoulders as he pasted the oafs who came into the ring like sheep to the slaughter in response to Mr. Bloxham's breezy invitation: You lads with big hearts, you lads with real guts that ain't stuffed with sawdust, twenty silver shillings if you stands up three rounds, and if so be as you gets a hiding you'll boast for the rest of your days that you had it from Battling Bill, the future welter-weight champ of Great Britain!

Usually they lasted about forty seconds. But Bill was careful not to make a mess of their faces. That would be bad for trade. He would flip away at their eyes and noses, and then, when they had raised both hands to defend themselves against his teasing left, he would go in with his right to the solar plexus, thump, thump, thump, three terrible short-arm jabs. But Bill was ever so nice to them afterwards. He helped them up and brushed the dust off their trousers and shaking them by the hand declared: "You put up a good fight, you had me real worried."

He behaved like a gent, and when the crowd cheered him he always patted his opponent on the shoulder, pretending it was the dazed victim whom they cheered. Leonora fell in love with him then, head over heels, as willing a sacrifice as any of the amateur boxers. Before long their Walking Out ripened into an Understanding.

It was because of this Understanding that she had joined Mr. Bloxham's show.

Her mother had died two years before; and her father had stayed on the road, travelling with his coco-nut shies while Leonora took her mother's place with the pythons. But her father started drinking, and then he took up with a big blowzy woman and married her, and after that everything went wrong. What money there was went on beer. The caravan that had been so neat and tidy became a shambles in which Leonora's father and his new wife bickered and fought. The woman was jealous of Leonora, and dragged her into their quarrels.

So Mr. Bloxham's offer, and the Understanding with Bill, had seemed to open up a way of escape from loneliness and misery. Mr. Bloxham had said to Leonora's father: "Now how'd it be if she tags along with us, and I smartens up her show a bit, and sends you every week twenty-five per cent of the takings? The snakes stay your property, and I sees to her pocket money and her keep? Then when she and my Bill gets spliced we can have another look at the arrangement."

It had seemed a wonderful offer, and Leonora had only been afraid lest her father should turn it down. But on the strength of getting three pounds a week for nothing he had sold the coco-nut shies and the caravan and taken a job in a factory and settled down with his new wife in some lodgings next door to a pub.

On the day Leonora joined Mr. Bloxham's show she and Bill had gone off together to the tattooist.

It was Bill's idea, and Leonora loved him all the more for it. He hadn't given her a ring, but this was better. You couldn't take it off and throw it back if you quarrelled. It seemed to set an unbreakable seal upon their Understanding. It was just the kind of irrevocable gesture which Leonora's young love cried out for. She was done first, and she hardly felt the little pricks of the needle: her heart was thumping and she was trembling so much that the tattooist kept saying, Now, you keep still.

Then Bill was done. He took off his shirt, and he was done in two colours, pink and blue, LEONORA, and a pierced heart same as hers, right in the middle of his solar plexus, where they can't hit me, he said, just let the beggars try. Bill paid the tattooist, and it cost much more than a ring.



When they came out of the tattooist's Bill said: "Well, it won't wash off, will it?"

Leonora's eager heart leaped at that. It wouldn't wash off either of them, ever.

That night in between her snake acts she slipped into the boxing booth and saw Bill fighting. The tattoo was still inflamed and it seemed to fascinate Bill's opponent, who kept jabbing at it. Bill's right glove was always there, though; and at last Bill got angry and suddenly let fly with his left and slammed the chap hard in the mouth, and knocked him clean off his feet; Leonora was horrified to hear the crack as his head met the floor. Bill told her afterwards that he'd knocked the beggar's front teeth out, and it served him right for trying to hit where it said LEONORA.

She was very happy for those first few days with Mr. Bloxham. He seemed kind, though he pawed a bit; she thought he did it by accident until one day she caught Mrs. Bloxham looking at him, and somehow the look told her it wasn't an accident at all. But Mrs. Bloxham didn't say anything. She never did. She was a pale, submissive woman with wispy hair, always in a flap about getting Mr. Bloxham's meals. Her cooking didn't often please him. She would make a sort of wan boast sometimes: "Mr. Bloxham never raises a hand to me." Once there were tears in her eyes and she looked almost fierce as she repeated: "No, he don't: never."

Gradually Leonora came to realize that he didn't need to. He used his voice like the whip with the steel tag on the end which once upon a time he'd used to tame tigers. He had shown this whip to Leonora. It seemed to her a horrible thing. But the tigers had had their own back. Mr. Bloxham showed Leonora a great scar, running crookedly down his forearm to his wrist and across the palm of his hand. "One of the devils mauled me."

That was why he'd given up training tigers, Leonora guessed; he was frightened of them. And because of them, he hated all animals, she thought.

"Don't you ever let your creepy-crawlies get the upper hand of you," he told her; and he insisted on providing her with a stick to keep in her pen—"in case the snakes get out of control." He didn't really believe Leonora when she told him they were as harmless as

kittens, though they were so strong; he thought that she had some special power over them, that she "charmed" them, whatever that might mean. So did Bill; and he who nightly strode into the boxing ring was like a nervous child in their presence. He couldn't bring himself to touch them. Whenever he or his father spoke of the snakes it was with a kind of shudder. "Nasty, wicked things."

So the stick stood always in the corner of Leonora's pen. Sometimes Mr. Bloxham would use it to beat upon his wooden counter outside when the flatties were slow to come in; but he always put it back afterwards. Doing so, he would shake it at the snakes as if to intimidate them; and he would admonish Leonora: "Don't you never forget you got to let them know who is the boss."

He let Mrs. Bloxham know who was the boss. She always jumped when his voice cracked at her.

Leonora had been brought up to accept the world as she found it; and she'd been happy enough until Ivy had joined the show, a couple of months ago. She liked the other girl, Petula, the one who was tipped out of bed. She was a comical little thing, pale-faced and dark-eyed, whose expression seemed perpetually poised half-way between gravity and mischief. She was only just seventeen, but she seemed much older than Leonora. It was she who asked Leonora, one night when they were in bed: "How much does he pay you, ducks, if it isn't a rude question?"

Leonora explained the arrangement which her father had made. Petula thought about it and said: "Well, I reckon he bought you, kind of, for three pounds a week. He's as mean as old Scrooge."

"Who's Scrooge?" said Leonora. Petula had got herself educated somehow. When she lay in the hammock, waiting to be thrown out of bed, she read a book of poetry by Robert W. Service which she'd bought for sixpence second hand. "It's ever so lovely," she said. Leonora tried it, but it didn't mean much to her. When she asked "Who's Scrooge?" Petula said, "Dickens, silly," and that didn't mean much either; so Petula added: "Anyhow, he's mean. Just you try asking him about that pocket money and you'll see."

Leonora asked him the next Saturday; and with some show of reluctance he gave her half a crown.

Then Ivy joined the show; and Mr. Bloxham was all over Ivy, just

as he'd been all over Leonora at the beginning. He bought a bottle of rum and after she'd been frozen on to the block of ice for twenty minutes or so and was released at last from her glass coffin he would pour out a tot for her in front of the crowd. "She's a good kid," he'd say. "Give her a hand, ladies and gents. And here's a drop of Nelson's blood to warm her, she's sure got a heart as big as a sailor's! Minus twenty degrees centigrade inside that box. Show 'em your back, Ivy"—and it was red as a beetroot where she'd been lying on the ice block. "Sometimes it near skins her," said Mr. Bloxham with relish. "She's tough though—ain't you, Ivy?"

Ivy *was* tough. She took Mr. Bloxham in her stride, and even dared to argue with him about her money on Saturday night. As well as being tough she was dirty, lazy and sly. She quickly sized up the pitiful situation of Mrs. Bloxham, and recognized that she could bully her with impunity. Whenever possible she avoided taking her turn with the odd jobs about the caravan; and she discovered somehow that Mrs. Bloxham was very shocked by swear-words when they came out of the mouths of young girls. So Ivy swore like a trooper to annoy her. Once Mrs. Bloxham said: "I don't know where you picked 'em up, those awful sayings, I don't reelly."

"In jug," said Ivy. She was curiously boastful about this. She'd been in reformatories, but she was most proud of her three weeks sentence in a genuine prison.

"What for, good heavens?" Petula had asked.

"I swiped some turtle-doves off a shop counter." Ivy liked to use rhyming slang.

Petula and Leonora looked at each other in bewilderment.

"For the benefit of you kids, a pair of gloves," said Ivy.

"Oh . . . shoplifting?" said Petula at last.

After that Petula, who was a very frugal girl and always kept her money in a small leather purse, counting it now and then, took care to put it under her pillow before she went to bed. One day she said to Leonora: "I'd keep a pretty sharp eye on Ivy if I was you, duckie," and Leonora thought she referred to Ivy's thieving so she hid her money too.

Later on she realized that Petula meant something different. She had been thinking of Ivy and Bill.

FOR QUITE a long time Leonora had noticed the change in Bill; how he had grown more off-hand with her, how he was less of a gent in the caravan than he was in the boxing ring, saying Git and do this, Git and do that, sometimes almost as sharply as his father spoke to Mrs. Bloxham. On one such occasion Mrs. Bloxham, who worshipped Bill, had turned to Leonora with a little smile, a funny one, almost as if she were smiling to herself. "Why, it's almost as if you two was married already!" she had said.

That was just after Bill had got beaten up at Nottingham; so Leonora, who was obstinately trusting, put it down to the fact that he'd been hurt. A sixteen-stone miner had come up into the ring. "Here's one whose guts ain't stuffed with sawdust," said Mr. Bloxham.

Bill, as usual, had played the matador, cleverly teasing his opponent, trying to make him angry. This time the tactics worked too well. Goaded into fury, the miner had suddenly gone for Bill head down like a charging bull; he swung his fists at random, but a chance blow landed and made Bill dizzy. The miner came into close quarters, pushing Bill into a corner, sixteen stone against ten seven. Bill tucked in his chin and fought his way clear; but he took some sledge-hammer blows on the forehead. One heavy clout opened an old cut over his eye, so that he couldn't see for blood, and when he put up his glove to wipe it away the miner swung a fist into his temple, pitching him on to the ropes.

Then the crowd began to stamp their feet and bay for the kill. There wasn't a kill, of course: Mr. Bloxham called time thirty seconds before the end of the round, and paid out two pounds instead of one to stop the crowd booing. Bill didn't pat his opponent on the shoulder this time. He sat in his corner, with his head between his knees.

He couldn't fight for a week after that. He stayed in the caravan, smoking dozens of cigarettes—and that was queer, because he didn't smoke much as a rule, he thought it was bad for his wind. Every night Leonora dressed the cut over his eye, and Bill would say anxiously: "How's it look, Lee? Is it healing clean? A thing like that can fix you, finish you for keeps."

It didn't seem much to Leonora. "Why, it's nothing," she said.

"Don't talk daft, you little fool. A chap who knew his business would just hammer away at it. When you get into the big money they all know their business."

She understood then, for the first time, that he really thought he was cut out to be a champion; and somehow, although she was quite ignorant of boxing, she was sure that he wasn't. She fought against this intuition, aware of disloyalty. Love and compassion for him tormented her; and Bill said roughly: "Oh, quit fussing, you! I'm going out."

It was the way she'd heard her father say he was going out. When Bill came back that night he fell up the steps of the caravan. Ivy heard him and said: "Elephant's trunk."

"*What?*" said Petula.

"For the benefit of you kids, drunk. Sozzled."

At last Bill started fighting again, and for a week or two it was all right; he gave up smoking, he went for long runs every morning to get himself fit. Then at Sheffield he ran into trouble with a hefty foundry worker. It wasn't so bad as Bill's last beating, and it didn't open the cut over his eye; but he sat all next day in the caravan—he'd got a headache, he felt funny, he "didn't want no food."

"What can you do when they just goes mad and swings at you?" he said. "It ain't fighting. It's ignorant. There's no art in it. But if you can't stop 'em, what's the use of art?"

He took another cigarette; and Leonora watched him, bewildered and dismayed, as he held the match three inches away from it and puffed in vain. The match went out. He lit another.

"Here, let me," said Leonora, and took the match from him.

"Quit fussing!" He got up, and the cigarette still unlit hung from his lips. "I'm sick an' tired of it! I'm going out."

Ivy slipped out of the caravan just afterwards. Leonora didn't think anything of it; and even when they came back together two hours later, and she realized that they'd both been to the pub, it troubled her only briefly, for she told herself that Bill in his misery wanted company and he knew that she didn't like pubs; she'd been shy and uncomfortable the only time he'd taken her to one. But she wished he'd asked her to go with him this time; she would have done anything to make him happy again.

She brushed away a faint unformulated jealousy of Ivy and thought

no more about it until two or three days later. It was a Sunday night, and Bill had gone off as soon as they'd put the tents up ready for the Fair on Monday. Ivy disappeared too, but she always made herself scarce if there was any work to be done. She didn't come back to supper; nor did Bill. Leonora and Petula went to bed in the second caravan, where the girls slept with Mrs. Bloxham; and Leonora lay awake, wondering.

Ivy came in at last, and Leonora pretended to be asleep as Ivy put on the light, wriggled out of her dress, and stood looking at her face in the looking-glass on the wall. Leonora could see her face in the looking-glass, and the lipstick smudged all round her mouth so that she looked like a clown. Ivy patted her hair, made faces at herself and, grubby as usual, dabbed off the lipstick with a handkerchief. Then, still in her underclothes, she got into bed. The light went out, and after a minute or two Petula's hand came out from the bunk alongside Leonora's and found Leonora's hand under the bedclothes. The hand tightened on hers and so the two girls lay, for hours it seemed, and listened to Mrs. Bloxham snoring.

Next day, and the day after, Leonora tried to persuade herself that Ivy hadn't been with Bill. Petula had said: "She's always out to pick up a man." It must have been somebody other than Bill, Leonora told herself.

On the second evening, after she'd put the snakes away, she was walking past the tent where Ivy had just come off the ice. She heard Bill's voice, and then through the tent flap she saw Bill and Ivy. She didn't mean to eavesdrop, but something made her stop, and she saw Bill helping Ivy on with her woolly wrap. Ivy was saying: "Coo, I'm perished. And no rum! Your Dad's a meanie."

Mr. Bloxham had stopped buying the rum for Ivy when he discovered how much it cost him. He told her that he'd received protests from teetotallers in the crowd.

"I'm proper perished," whined Ivy again; and then some warning voice in Leonora's mind told her not to listen or look any longer, and in sudden panic she dashed past the open tent flap; but it was too late, for although she turned her head away she couldn't stop her ears. She heard Bill laugh at Ivy's complaint about the rum. Then his words came loud and clear: "Never mind. I'll warm you."

She should have known then, for sure, what was happening. Yet she clung for a little longer to her faith in Bill (or perhaps in love as a kind of magic) because that faith was all she had. She hung on to it for dear life, kidding herself that whatever went on in Ivy's tent had been only a joke, Bill's clumsy horseplay, the sort of thing which Mrs. Bloxham, authoritative about men, had learned to pass off with a shrug: "You got to let men have some fun."

The thought wasn't much comfort; but it was something, and it lasted Leonora until next morning. She learned the truth then, and she learned it from Ivy; though Ivy didn't tell her in words.

About an hour before the Fair opened, Leonora was leaning over the snakes' cage and watching Kaa, who was about to change his skin. She was thinking that if he didn't hurry up about it she wouldn't be able to have him in the pen with her. His eyes, generally so bright, had been dull lately; the warm colours which dappled his coat had become muddy-looking. He was thirsty, and kept upsetting his water; and now he was rubbing his nose against the rough boards of his cage.

Suddenly the old skin rolled back like thin parchment, and inch by inch Kaa emerged—it was like a butterfly hatching from its chrysalis. Oh, he looked like a painted snake now! His coat glistened in the sun, its green patches were shining like water-lily pads, its brown ones were the colour of beech leaves in autumn. Leonora's delight as she watched the transformation had made her forget about herself altogether; it was as if she had been spirited into her secret Forest, where all the colours were as vivid as Kaa's. If only human beings could shed their skins and come out as new creatures!

Then she happened to glance up, and saw Ivy peering over her shoulder. "What's that piece as has come off of it?" demanded Ivy, pointing into the cage.

"His old skin. Look." Leonora lifted the glass top of the cage and reached down for it. It was crackly, torn in places where Kaa had rubbed against the boards. "Sometimes they come off whole. Mummy used to fold the whole ones up and use them as bookmarks." Her mother had possessed a Bible, and used to read it; Leonora remembered Catherine's old skin marking her place in the Psalms. But she didn't say anything to Ivy about the Bible.

Ivy exclaimed: "I'd never of thought it. I say—like us, ain't they?"

Leonora didn't know what she meant. Ivy's manner was puzzling her, and she was wary, because Ivy had never sought her company before. Ivy's small, close-set eyes were adance with some mischief or other; she kept glancing at Leonora with an odd curiosity. And she was restless, shuffling her feet, jiggling her hips—Leonora could sense her excitement. Ivy had made up extra heavily too, with a lot of rouge and orange-red lipstick, and in readiness for her act she'd done her eyelids with blue and drawn a thick brown pencil-line upward from their outer edges.

"Why like us?" Leonora said.

"Strip-teasers, ain't we?" grinned Ivy. "You got to hand it to old Bloxham; he knows his onions. You don't suppose the flatties roll up to look at your snakes, dear, do you?"

"Mummy used to wear black tights. So did I," said Leonora; and she wished she hadn't said it because of the way Ivy was looking at her, still curious, but now half sneering. She turned her head to watch Kaa.

"If you thinks they come to see the snakes," Ivy went on, "you're just a school kid, you ain't grown up. How old are you?"

"Seventeen," said Leonora, still looking away.

"When I was seventeen——" Ivy giggled and gave Leonora a pinch in the ribs, so that she had to look at her, and face to face with Ivy she suddenly felt, not seventeen, but seventy, because she understood so much. She knew why Ivy had come to her; what she had wanted to make sure of, and why she was now triumphant, being sure. She knew about Ivy's queer excitement, that it was because of what had happened last night; and that Ivy was almost *wanting* to tell her about it.

Openly tormenting now, Ivy said shrilly: "You're only a kid! You're too good to be true, duckie!"

It was like a crow of triumph. She ran away then and looked back once over her shoulder, and laughed.

That happened a week ago. So for seven days Leonora had known that Bill was going with Ivy. Indeed they no longer made a secret of it and when Bill said: "I'm going out" he would add quite openly: "Coming along, Ive?" Then Mrs. Bloxham would turn her peaky face, first towards Bill in acceptance and adulation, and then towards Leonora with that small, secret smile. It was as if she said: "You got to put up with it like I did. Men are different from us. It's *their* world.

They make the rules. You better get used to it now, my dear; for he'll be like this, always."

Always. Because in spite of Ivy, their Understanding remained the same Understanding. Only yesterday Bill had been talking about buying a third caravan, and he'd said quite casually: "When we gets spliced, when you're me old cow and kisses—" (He'd caught the rhyming slang from Ivy, of course.) And he was possessive as ever. He still looked to Leonora to stick the plaster over his eye and to mend his clothes, which she'd always loved doing. He still said "Git and do it" in the whiplash voice, so like his father's. He still told her—and sometimes Leonora thought she could have borne anything but this—of the secret fear which he would not tell to anybody else in the world.

"Look straight at me, Lee. Stretch out your left arm."

"Yes."

"Straight out." He stared at her hand. "Twiddle your fingers. There's a shadow there. Move your hand in towards me. It's coming out of the shadow. That's what they do to me. I could box 'em silly, but they come out of the shadow. *Lee—*"

"Yes, Bill?"

"I can't see your hand, Lee. *There's golden fountains there.*"

"Please," she begged him. "Go and see a doctor, Bill. He'd fix you. He'd fix your headaches too."

"Oh, quit fussing. . . . I'm going out."

She knew—but she couldn't tell how she knew—that he never spoke of this to Ivy. It was for her alone, because of their Understanding. Ivy wouldn't last: she knew that too. But there would be other Ivys. Mrs. Bloxham's smile told her that.

A IN'T YOU scared?"

It was the red-faced man, of course, peering down into her pen. Once again Leonora shook her head. She shut her eyes, shut them tight now, because she didn't want to look at the red-faced man. She lay right back on the cushions, with Kaa's plump coils making an extra cushion for her shoulder blades. She was aware of Catherine suddenly stirring, she felt the skin of Catherine's belly, dry and warm and rasping, as Catherine uncoiled herself and made for the oil-stove. She tugged with

both hands at Catherine's tail and heard her hiss as she turned back suddenly.

The red-faced man said, "Ain't you scared?" for the second time—and Leonora screwed up her eyes tight again and felt the tears come hot behind the lids. Not because she minded the red-faced man nor any of the flatties, but because of that one word "scared" which had grown big in her mind for seven days and nights. Scared, scared, scared: not of the snakes of course, but of life itself, life that had seemed to close in on her like a cage, that had shut the door with a clang when she heard Bill say to Ivy, "I'll warm you," and that had bolted it firmly and for ever when he had said, "I can't see your hand, Lee. . . . *There's golden fountains.*"

Leonora was scared stiff.

She took refuge in her Forest. Through a chink in her eyelids she saw the twilight green, Kaa's coils still vivid from his skin change, Catherine's beautiful head swinging, swinging. . . . The oil-stove sang like singing insects. The ape-voices chattered. She thought of blue butterflies that floated rather than flew. Antelopes with melting eyes. Tigers uncaged, untamed, unwhipped, that would nuzzle her like cats; for all the creatures were benevolent in Leonora's Forest. They were kindlier than humans, much kindlier than Mr. Bloxham who was wah-wukking on his soap-box. She knew exactly what he was saying: Walk up, walk up, see the bee-utiful Jungle Girl, talk about Eve in the Garden of Eden, she ain't got nothing on (pardon the pun) nothing on what we're going to show you, this is real artistic this is but there's a thrill in every second, one false move and the deadly serpents strike, walk up and see the bee-utiful Jungle Girl defying death with a smile. . . .

When Leonora opened her eyes again, banishing the green twilight, she found herself looking straight up at a tall young man who amusedly smiled at her. He was the nearest flatty to the entrance, so presumably he'd only just come in; and when Leonora caught his eye he was looking faintly surprised, as if despite Mr. Bloxham's high-flown oratory he hadn't expected to see a small girl in a bikini twined about by two large pythons. It happened that just then Leonora was using both hands to remove Catherine's head from the vicinity of her nose; for ever since Catherine had nipped her she had been wary. A snake bite on the nose wouldn't be pleasant! Catherine was very strong, and Leonora had to

grip her tight and heave quite hard. She was half angry with Catherine, and she probably looked it, because the young man's surprised smile broadened into a grin. It was a grin of complete understanding. It seemed to say, Yes, she's a silly old snake, isn't she?—which was exactly what Leonora was thinking.

No flatty, ever before, had seemed to think what she was thinking. No flatty had ever established any kind of communion with her. In her astonishment Leonora tightened her hold on Catherine's throat, and Catherine in one of her little tempers thumped the floor with her tail; she spat like a cat at Leonora, *sssst!* and the flatties all round the pen uttered an anticipatory *Oo*. (One false move and the deadly serpents strike.) The tall young man, however, continued on his way round the pen with the air of one who had seen stranger things. He didn't linger, yet he didn't hurry. Now and then he glanced at Leonora and whenever he did so Leonora had to smile. It was as if Catherine's fit of temper, and the fading ferns and the water trough lettered FIDO on which the young man's glance amusedly fell—as if these things, and the very fact of Leonora being in the pen at all, were some private joke which they shared between them.

At last, half-way round the pen, the young man laughed; and Leonora found herself laughing too. By now she had ceased to think of him as a flatty. She saw him in depth. It was surely the strangest thing that had ever happened to her. The snakes were forgotten, and she was sitting up straight with the palms of her hands pressed hard against the canvas floor. She was watching him as he strode round the pen with his sailor's rolling stride.

Already she knew him to be a sailor. He brought a breath of a larger world with him. He had seen oceans, lands of the black men, lands of the yellow men, deserts, *Forests*. Leonora was sure of it. Yet she could only see the top part of him as he went round her pen; light hair, lean face, freckles, merry eyes, quick smile, the jauntiness of his broad shoulders as he walked.

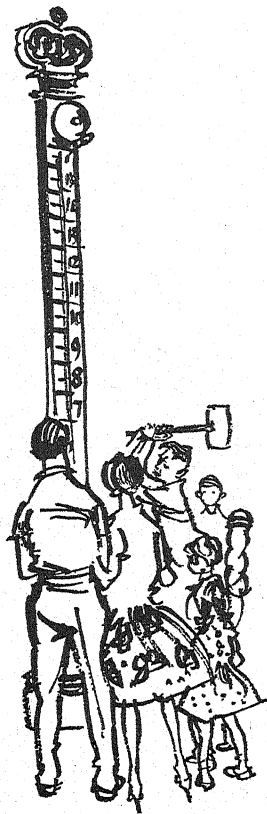
Proceeding upon his way, he came at last to where the red-faced man, with his elbows on the framework, had stuck out his big rear so that people had to wriggle past it. He paused before the red-faced man, regarding him keenly, as the man in his turn stared at Leonora. Ever since she had sat up, the piggy eyes had been boring away at the

tattooed heart between her shoulder blades. Made aware of it, she quickly lay back on her cushions. She couldn't have told why she didn't want the tall young man to see it. He hadn't seen it, because he had been looking hard at the fat flatty. He now said, "Excuse me," and the flatty took no notice. Then the merriment went out of the young man's eyes. He leaned behind the flatty and took hold of him by his elbows.

"Move along then, mate, you've had your tanner's worth," the young man said, and without any fuss, without any apparent effort at all, he propelled the bewildered flatty before him and marched out of the exit. It was done so quickly that the other flatties seemed not to have noticed. They continued round her pen, but faster now because the fat man was out of the way: an endless procession of faces cut out of cardboard.

She knew the young man would come back again in the evening. Now she imagined him going round the Fair, a slide down the chute, a ride on the swings, a bang at the punch ball—with those shoulders he'd surely ring the bell! Willy the Weight-guesser would call to him, Have a go, sailor, genuine gold ring if I fail—and would pat his hips, glance at his shoulders, guess him right at eleven stone four! Old Connie on the coco-nut shies would cry out, Have a go, sailor, four shies a shilling—and he'd surely pick out the old dirty balls, which were heavy because they'd been in the rain so often, instead of the new clean ones, which were light. Oh yes, he'd got some sense about him, he wasn't like a flatty at all!

Rolling along with the coco-nuts tucked under his arm, he'd pop in to look at the Hairy Woman, poor Mollie who wasn't quite right in the head; and he'd smile at her with that smile which was his frank acceptance of whatever he saw, and Mollie who hated flatties because she was ashamed of being hairy would like him for it and remember



his smile. Gipsy Lee at the entrance to her small square tent would cry, Tell your fortune, pretty gentleman, your fortune for a shilling; then she'd say: "I see ships, a long voyage, foreign lands. . . ." They'd all know he was a sailor! Petula lying in her hammock and reading her new book of poetry, *A Child's Garden of Verses* by R. L. Stevenson, would look up and catch his smile and cheat perhaps to please him, for there was a string she could pull if trade was bad: out she'd come, laughing, in her pink nightie that made the boys whistle. . . . And Ivy on her block of ice—no! Leonora willed him not to go in and see Ivy.

She'd scarcely finished her imaginary tour of the Fair, in which she was a kind of invisible guiding spirit at the sailor's side, when it was half past five and time for her tea break. Leonora went into the caravan where Mrs. Bloxham was cooking sausages and bubble-and-squeak and Petula in her nightdress was making tea. Petula recited:

*"And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?"*

Ivy came in at that moment, very hoity-toity with her scarlet wrap slung over her shoulders. She said: "Po'try. If you've got eddication how can you stick being tipped out of bed? Coo, I'm cold. Thank heavens, Rosy Lee."

"For the benefit of us kids, cup of tea," said Petula. "But it might just as well be *nasty flea*. I've got one. Wonder who I caught it off."

Ivy flew at Petula, who coolly dodged behind Mrs. Bloxham and asked in a tone of innocence: "How could I know that a person who was *proud* of going to prison would mind about a little thing like fleas?" Her teasing maddened Ivy, and perhaps there would have been a fight if Mrs. Bloxham hadn't at that moment set fire to the fat in the frying pan. It was a common accident with her. She always said, with bleak simplicity: "It caught."

Mrs. Bloxham dished up the burnt sausages with the least burnt bits of bubble-and-squeak and put the plates on the table. "How can I cook with you kids bickering? Now talk about something *nice* for a change."

"Well, look at Leonora," said Petula at last.

They all looked at her.

"What's the matter with me?" Leonora pulled her dressing-gown tight about her.

"You look funny," said Petula. "You look different. You look as if you'd seen blithering angels with harps and haloes."

"Well, I never," said Mrs. Bloxham. "How you do talk, Pet."

They'd nearly finished their sausages when Mr. Bloxham came in. He stood in the doorway, sniffing; Mrs. Bloxham stared at her plate. The whip cracked at last: "As usual, cinders," and Mrs. Bloxham jumped about six inches off the seat of her chair.

"Git an' cook a fresh lot," said Mr. Bloxham. He sat down at the table. "Bill's eye's split open again. These Welsh chaps box crooked. . . . You gels, git back to business."

Leonora said suddenly: "Mr. Bloxham, please——"

"Yes, gel?"

"Can I wear a top tonight? It goes cold in September. Can I wear a top?"

"You ain't going religious, are you?" he said. It was an abiding fear of his. He'd had a strip-tease dancer once who went religious, and it was the end of her. So now he stared at Leonora anxiously, as if he studied her for symptoms. "You look a bit funny. Are you quite sure you ain't going religious?"

Leonora shook her head, and wondered again why she looked funny to everybody tonight; a little lie tripped readily off her tongue. "I've got a bit of a cold."

"Oh, well, if it's *that*." He was so relieved that he became almost genial. "Then wrap yourself up, gel, just this once; bless me, I'll have to leave out that bit about Eve in the Garden of Eden!"

So SHE wore a little green jacket on top of the bikini; and she didn't need to lie back on the cushions, to hide the tattoo mark in case the sailor should come in suddenly. She still wasn't willing to admit to herself why it seemed important to conceal it from him. But for the first time she was aware of it as something bizarre; and for the first time she was dismayed by the memory of Bill's words: "It won't wash

off, will it?" She was glad of the green jacket; and now she sat up in her pen with a tingling alertness, and eagerly glanced at the entrance every time a new flatty came in.

She had no clock, but a church clock struck the hours and the quarters sweet and clear above the braying of the roundabouts. It was half past nine when the sailor came, and he'd got a goldfish in a bowl in one hand and a lot of coco-nuts tucked under his other arm; but he gave the coco-nuts to some kids on his way round the pen. The moment he saw Leonora his look said: "Hello, so you're dressed up tonight." It was funny how easily they could talk just by looking. But once again he didn't linger. She knew why: he was thinking that it made her into an exhibit if he lingered. He moved with quick assurance round the pen; and once again they laughed at each other, she at him because of the goldfish, he at her because Catherine was playing up again and spitting like a cobra.

The sailor went straight out after that; but she knew he'd be back again before the Fair ended. He came back just after eleven, and now he had an enormous white rabbit wrapped in cellophane as well as the goldfish. He also had two vases and a willow-pattern plate and some more coco-nuts. He was finding it difficult to carry all these things; he had the endearing awkwardness of a man who goes off to do the shopping without a basket. Leonora laughed out loud at him, surprising the flatties. Somehow or other he made the rabbit bow to her, just before he went out; and the look he gave her wasn't a good-bye look, so it was no surprise when she found him waiting outside for her after she'd put the snakes away in their cage.

Indeed Leonora looked for him as she came out of the tent, and at first she couldn't see him among the shadows. There was always a sudden nightfall after the Fair's false day, when the show ground emptied itself of people, as if they had been moths that only the bright lights had called thither. Debris blew about on a cold shrill wind—paper bags and sweet wrappings made tiny scraping sounds upon the tarmac. Leonora sensed the desolation and matched it with a desolation of her spirit as she glanced about her and saw nobody there. A moment later he stood before her. His arms were clasped round his numerous winnings, and from behind the rabbit he spoke to her: "Hello."

"Hello," she said, and heard him laugh, and as she laughed too she

had a sudden strange warm feeling of unwonted companionship, something she'd never had with anybody, not even with Bill.

"However did you win such a lot?"

"I don't know! I just couldn't go wrong. Like I was bewitched!"

"I've never known anybody win a rabbit before."

"It's for you," he said.

"Me? Oh, but I . . ." but already he'd tipped it into her arms.

"And the goldfish?" he said.

"I've never had a goldfish."

"Would you mind having the other things too?" he said diffidently. "You see, I've got a motor-bike. I couldn't carry them home—"

"Where's your home?" She had a sharp sense of fleeting seconds, she wanted to find out all about him, and there wouldn't be time. Perhaps he had it too; for the short sentences were like balls thrown from one to another.

"Up the valley. Five



miles. It's my mother's house. I'm on leave from my ship——"

A ship! She'd known it.

"She's in the docks, loading. I've got a week."

"Then where to?"

"Singapore," he said.

"Oh!" She didn't know where it was; but it sang to her. "Is there Forests there?"

"It's a sort of island; but in Malaya there's jungles. Tigers, elephants, everything."

Now she could almost hear the seconds ticking. They'd be having cocoa in the caravan—she'd never been late before. There was still something she wanted to ask him.

"Why did you shove out the red-faced fl——?" She nearly said flatty. "The fat man?"

"I didn't like the way he was looking at you."

It had never occurred to her to mind how they stared. That this stranger should mind on her behalf was a new thing in her experience. She became tongue-tied, inexplicably.

They looked at each other for quite a long time, neither speaking, wasting precious seconds, while the arc lamps about the show ground went out one by one, and the eager tongues of darkness lengthened, licking up what little light still lay like spilt milk upon the ground.

"I'll come tomorrow," he said at last.

"Tomorrow!"

"I thought we might go round the Fair," he said. "In your dinner-time."

"Me?"

"—But you wouldn't want to? Roundabouts and things?"

"I've never been on the roundabouts."

"You've *never*?"

"No." She giggled, aware for the first time that this might seem to be an extraordinary thing.

"Like a girl in a sweet-shop," he smiled, "not eating sweets?"

"I'd like to come, though."

"You would?"

"Honest." She nodded for emphasis. She'd no idea how she could do it without the Bloxhams knowing. But there must be a way; she'd ask

Petula. She thought that Petula, who read poetry, would think up a plan. Anyhow, she would go. A tenuous small flame of defiance burnt within her. I'm free, they haven't bought me. And they can't kill me for it, whatever I do.

"Please, I'd love to come," she repeated. "One o'clock, I get off for dinner."

Another lamp went out; black tongues licked dry another pool of light; and as if he too were a long tongue of shadow Bill's presence seemed to thrust itself between them. She was aware of it before she saw him, a whole second before his voice lashed out at her: "*Leel!*" She backed away, and now she was side by side with the sailor. Bill faced them. "Git on in," he said to her.

She was clutching the rabbit and the goldfish; she didn't know how she managed to grasp the vases and the plate, which the sailor unhurriedly gave her. She had time to stammer "Good-bye" before he dropped his coco-nuts on to the ground and she realized with dismay what was in his mind. He wanted to have his hands free for fighting. She cried out "No!"

Bill turned towards the sailor. "And you git out of it!"

She cried again, "*Please——*" She saw the sailor hesitate, turning his face towards her even as he squared up to Bill. Her eyes, her hands, all her being, the very essence of her spirit strove to speak to him: Go now, for my sake, and come back tomorrow. Tomorrow, tomorrow, *tomorrow*. And suddenly he understood. His hands dropped, he turned away, and Bill said with easy contempt: "If you ever do want an argument you know where to find me," and he pointed towards the boxing booth.

The sailor half turned to Bill, and looked at him hard. He said, "Yes, I'll know where to find you," very quietly. Then he was gone. The last light went out, and a great shadow swallowed him.

Leonora had put so much of herself into that soundless plea to him that now she felt empty and hollow. She couldn't move her legs when Bill said: "Git on in." He gave her a push, quite hard, in the small of her back, and she nearly toppled over. The willow-pattern plate and the vases fell out of her hand and smashed on the ground. Then Bill pushed her again, propelling her towards the caravan. She clutched the rabbit and the goldfish as she stumbled up the steps. In the caravan

Bill caught her by the shoulders and swung her round. The goldfish bowl slid out of her hand on to the table, and she felt the cold water splash against her leg. The rabbit toppled out of her arm and fell at her feet. There was nobody else in the caravan, but she was aware of Mr. Bloxham coming to the entrance, pausing there and drawing back, watching them from the dark outside. Bill's grip was painful on her shoulders. He said: "You're my gel, ain't you?"

The cut over his eye was red and open; he hadn't put any plaster on it. She had always been the one who put the plaster on. He'd been drinking, she knew, though he wasn't drunk.

"You're my gel?"

She didn't answer.

"Then mucking about with flatties ain't allowed."

He took one hand off her shoulder. She felt the grasp of his other hand tighten. He hit her hard with his open palm on the side of her face just below the eye.

"Now git off to bed." He let her go and as she dodged round him she saw him kick the rabbit. She got to the door and fled down the steps; she ran into Mr. Bloxham as he stood there, right into his belly which was yielding as a pillow. He grunted, and she ducked under his arm and ran on.

There was still a light in Mrs. Bloxham's caravan. She ran up the steps, and then stopped, afraid to go in. Her face was burning and she pressed it against the cold varnish of the door. She clung to the door-knob, sobbing silently. After a bit the light in the caravan went out and she sat down on the steps. She saw Mr. Bloxham and Bill come out of the other caravan. They didn't see her, though they passed quite close, walking arm in arm. Bill said something Leonora didn't hear. Mr. Bloxham laughed.

"Oh, you got to treat 'em rough, you got to let 'em know right away who's the master." Bill laughed then, but uneasily. Then a wind blew up, and she couldn't catch what they were saying. She could hear only the unhappiness in Bill's tone, the same as when he talked to her about the golden fountains. Then Mr. Bloxham spoke again, and the gust which blew away his words left a faint smear behind it.

There was a stillness after the gust, and Bill's voice cracked out at Mr. Bloxham like one of his vicious punches. "Shut up about her or

"I'll——" She heard Mr. Bloxham's voice, soothing, soft-soaping. "Meant no harm . . . your old Dad" The voices became a murmur, the steps died away in the distance. A paper hat scudding by on the wind gave a sigh like a ghost's passing.

She wanted the rabbit. So she got up at last and went on tiptoe, though there was nobody about, to Mr. Bloxham's caravan. The light had been left on, but she couldn't see the rabbit. She searched for it, terrified of being caught there, and as she went round the caravan in breathless panic she encountered all the queer things Mr. Bloxham had collected in his years of showmanship: the tiger skin ("That was the one that mauled me; they had to shoot it; once they've tasted human blood they're no good any more"); the six-legged calf; the shrunken head from South America. This head had a tiny little wicked cruel face, and long black hair. Mr. Bloxham called it Charlie. He thought its hair by going wet or dry predicted the weather. He'd pick it up and say, "Hey, Charlie, what's it going to do today? Rain?"

Leonora shied away from it. Then she spotted the rabbit lying in a corner. She ripped off the torn cellophane and hugged the rabbit. She caught sight of the goldfish in the bowl on the table; it was flopping about, opening and shutting its mouth, in half an inch of water. She filled the bowl from the jug over the sink, and went warily towards the door. Clutching her trophies, she scurried across the twenty-yard gap between the two caravans. She didn't need to put the light on: her bunk was the one nearest the door. She hid the goldfish in the cupboard under the bunk; but she took the rabbit to bed with her, pushing it well down under the bedclothes. She pressed her hot face into the pillow; and if she cried nobody heard her above the noise of Mrs. Bloxham's snoring, which was quite out of character with Mrs. Bloxham. It was deep and angry, as if by snoring like a lion at night she compensated for behaving like a mouse all day.

BREAKFAST was always porridge, bread and marg, and jam; but the men had eggs and bacon as a tribute to their superior estate.

The men did not appear at breakfast except on Sundays. On weekdays Mrs. Bloxham carried the eggs and bacon across to their caravan. So bearing her burnt offerings to the men she went out this morning,

leaving a slice of over-cooked bacon in the pan. Ivy jumped up from her porridge and greedily wolfed it. Coming back to the table, she caught sight of Leonora's swollen eye. She grinned.

"Someone's been typewriting."

Mrs. Bloxham came back into the room and sat down with a sigh which suggested that Mr. Bloxham had complained about his bacon.

"Someone's been typewriting," said Ivy again.

"Why don't you try to speak proper English, dear?" said Mrs. Bloxham. "'Stead of talking silly like you picked up in that place?" But she followed Ivy's glance and looked at Leonora.

"I fell down," Leonora said.

Ivy said: "That's a good one."

Leonora tried in vain to swallow her mouthful of porridge as Ivy and Mrs. Bloxham stared at her. Petula kept her head bent down over her poetry book.

Ivy, in her prison fashion, spoke out of the side of her mouth, so that Mrs. Bloxham couldn't hear: "Maybe someone we know was just putting in a bit of practice. He sure needs it, duckie."

Petula suddenly closed her poetry book with a bang and shied it across the table at Ivy. The edge of the stiff cover caught Ivy across the bridge of her nose. It hurt, and Ivy promptly threw the contents of her teacup at Petula. Mrs. Bloxham began to cry. This was so unexpected that Ivy and Petula stopped quarrelling and stared. Mrs. Bloxham made a high thin pitiful noise, like the first bleat of a lamb. Petula warmhearted as ever, put her arm round Mrs. Bloxham, who stopped bleating and snorted into a handkerchief.

"It's my nerves," she snivelled. "When you girls fight it jangles them. Nobody don't realize it, but I got nerves terrible." After a few more snorts she said to Leonora: "Come with me, dear—I'll put some of the men's butter on that eye of yours."

She led her to the end of the caravan, where her little larder was. She cut off a sliver from the butter pat which was sacred to Mr. Bloxham and Bill and smeared it round Leonora's puffy eye and bruised cheekbone.

"There. But you'll have to put plenty of make-up over it, else you'll look awful with them snakes." She contemplated Leonora thoughtfully; then she faintly smiled.

"You got to learn to humour them," she said. "You got to begin as you mean to go on. Mr. Bloxham's never lifted a hand to me: not in all our twenty years he hasn't never."

IT'S EASY as pie," said Petula, gloriously vindicating Leonora's faith in her. "We tell them that you and I, instead of dinner, are going for a picnic."

"A picnic?" Leonora's face fell. "They won't believe that, will they?"

"Why not? It's a fine day."

"But have you ever been on a picnic?"

Petula shook her head.

"Nor have I. What do you do?"

"Eat," said Petula.

"We haven't got anything to eat."

"I've got two bob. I'll buy some buns in a paper bag. We'll pretend to go off for our picnic. But as soon as you meet the flattie, I'll make myself scarce."

"But what will *you* do, Pet?"

"I'll have a picnic."

"Where?"

"Here, I think," said Petula, thoughtfully wrinkling up her nose. "It's ever so nice."

They were in a churchyard. Petula had chosen it, with quick intelligence, as a place where none of the show people were likely to go. They could be private here. Yellow chestnut leaves floated down out of a blue sky. An old man was trimming yew trees but he took no notice of them, not even when they sat down on a tombstone just outside the church porch.

"I like it here," said Petula simply. "It would be nice to be buried here, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would," said Leonora. She looked round at the trim grass and the serious chestnut trees and an angel in white marble with its wings folded over its back like a butterfly's. It was so quiet you could hear the chestnut leaves falling. Leonora had hardly ever known quiet before. "I say, look out," she said, nudging Petula. A clergyman in a

black cassock came bustling out of the church door. They both jumped off the tombstone. He smiled.

"Don't worry," he said. "It's sunny there."

"We wondered if it mattered," Petula said.

The clergyman glanced at the tombstone.

"*Eliza Jenkins,*" he read, "*departed this life June the third 1839 having spent herself in the happy and devoted service of her fellows. Rest in Peace.*" Doesn't sound as if she'd mind. I'd sit on her."

"Thank you, sir," said Petula.

"You're from the Fair, aren't you?" said the clergyman, half laughing at them.

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"They tip me out of bed," said Petula. "Lee has snakes."

"Goodness. Well, go on sitting there. And if you ever want to go inside—it's open."

The clergyman hurried off, his cassock swishing like an old country-woman's skirt. Petula said: "Have you ever been inside one?"

"No."

"Nor me. There are a lot of things we haven't done," she reflected gravely. "Picnics, churches"

*"The world is so full of a number of things
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."*

"Does that come out of the poetry book?" Leonora asked. "I like it."

"Happy as kings," said Petula, nodding. "I say, Lee. Think of Mrs. Bloxham."

Leonora thought of her. "Well?"

"Bill hit you? Oh yes he did. Bill goes with Ive; but he doesn't mean to marry Ive. He's got that much sense. *He wants you for his Mrs. Bloxham.*"

Leonora stared in horror at Petula; for she had never dreamed that anybody else had seen those iron bars closing, had heard the bolt slide home on that trap which in her private thoughts had become so terrifying. She jumped up off the tombstone, in panic almost because Petula had described the nature of the trap so exactly.

Wrinkling up her nose like a rabbit about to nibble a lettuce leaf, Petula went on: "Know what I'd do if I was you? I'd vamoose. I would, Lee."

"But *where*?" And with that *where* she admitted to herself that she had already thought about running away.

"Home! Snakes and all," said Petula. "After all, they're *your* snakes. And they're quite valuable, aren't they?"

Leonora had even thought of that. But you simply couldn't pick up the snakes and run away. You couldn't carry their cage, for one thing; it weighed an awful lot. And what was "home?" Not the lodgings where her father lived and fought with the big woman.

Leonora shook her head. Tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, Pet, I'm in such a muddle."

Petula said swiftly: "We'll think up something. Forget it for today! I'll have my picnic and you'll meet your flatty——"

"He's not a flatty," said Leonora.

"What?"

"He's a person."

Petula gazed at her thoughtfully. All at once she began to laugh, and soon Leonora was laughing too. Then right over their heads the church clock boomed out the first stroke of the hour.

"Help, it's eleven!"

"I've got to brown myself, too," said Leonora.

The shows all opened at eleven thirty. Hand in hand the two girls began to run down the path between the chestnut trees. Petula bent down to pick up a green spiny shell. As she ran she split it open, and tossed the sticky nut to Leonora. Even that was an unfamiliar thing. Leonora found a small inexplicable delight in handling it. From a branch high overhead a big yellow leaf came floating down like a parachute and Petula jumped high to capture it before it fell. They were both caught up in a moment of happiness, and the old man trimming the yews, and the parson coming back to the church for morning service, both smiled to see them as they ran laughing through the wrought-iron gates. Leonora said: "Pet——"

"Yes, Lee?"

"Say that piece of poetry again."

Petula said it.

LEONORA browned herself all over, and put the make-up on thick over her swollen eye, and went across to her tent. She had bundled up a jumper and a skirt so that she could slip them on over the bikini at one o'clock. Petula meanwhile had bought two red apples and some sugary buns, and, carrying the paper bags ostentatiously, she had coolly announced to Mrs. Bloxham: "It's such a nice day Lee and I thought we'd go for a picnic"—as if for Fair folk to go picnicking were the most natural thing in the world. Mrs. Bloxham merely said, "Well, I never," and went on with her ironing.

Leonora hid the jumper and skirt under the cushion in her pen. It was twenty-five past eleven, and Mr. Bloxham came in resplendent in his top-hat, with a very faded carnation in his buttonhole—he always tried to make them last for five days.

"Here a minute," he said. He put his hands on Leonora's shoulders and turned her towards the light. "You fell down?"

"Yes, Mr. Bloxham."

"Well, lucky it don't show too much." He regarded her gloomily. "You ain't still got a cold? Take that thing off," he said. She had put on the green top again.

"Please, Mr. Bloxham, I——"

"You got tantrums, I think," said Mr. Bloxham, "if you ain't got religion. Take it off."

Leonora did so, and had an unaccustomed awareness of her body. It was a new thing, uncomfortable. Mr. Bloxham abstractedly fumbled in his breast pocket and at last brought out a crumpled envelope. She recognized the writing even before he handed her the letter inside it.

Dear Fred, she read. Thanks for the cash. But you knocked off a pound a week for two chickens for the snakes. It won't do. We never said as I had to pay for feeding the snakes. You said three pounds a week clear. You better cough up. Hoping this finds you as it leaves me at present, Harry.

Leonora read the letter unmoved by affection or homesickness. There was no affection, there was no home. Mr. Bloxham said: "He's cutting up nasty. Your Pa's got no call for to cut up nasty."

Leonora was reminded that the snakes hadn't been fed since yesterday

week. They were supposed to get one chicken, once a week.

"It's time they was fed again, Mr. Bloxham."

"They got to wait. Everything's expensive here. I'll get two hens cheap from a farmer when we move on the day after tomorrow."

"It's more than a week——" said Leonora doubtfully.

"Well, they can go for a week, can't they? Like camels."

Leonora's obstinate passion for accuracy made her say: "It's water camels go without, Mr. Bloxham."

She immediately regretted it. He snapped at her: "None of your lip. Yes, you got tantrums. Don't let me see you wearing that top thing. You got to earn your keep, gel. Git them snakes, now; we're late starting." He strode out. A moment later he was on his soap-box, screeching: "Walk up, walk up, ladies and gents——"

Leonora settled down on her cushions. Soon the first flatties came in, the mildly curious, disparaging flatties of the morning session—cold-blooded they always seemed by comparison with the livelier crowds of afternoon and evening. "Of course there's no *danger* to her, really," they said regretfully. A child asked: "What's that funny mark she's got on her back, Mummy?" Leonora longed for her green jacket. She was miserably aware now of the inadequacy of the bikini. She kept remembering what the sailor had said about the red-faced man: "I didn't like the way he was looking at you"—because of this she was troubled as she had never been before by the way the flatties looked at her: it was something she had never really noticed until today. The tattoo mark was the worst thing of all, for it seemed to fascinate them; she could almost *feel* it, pricking between her shoulder blades. She lay back whenever she could to hide it.

She was troubled also by the puffiness round her eye. Now and then she prodded it with her finger; every time it seemed bigger, and she imagined that the flatties were staring at it even when they were staring at the snakes. The smarting had died down, but the memory of the blow was like a bruise upon her mind.

Her thoughts kept running back to the moment when Bill's left hand had been lifted off her shoulder: she could have ducked then but a kind of sick dismay at what he was going to do to her had precluded fear. That came later, with Mrs. Bloxham saying *Begin as you mean to go on*, with Petula telling her *He wants you for his Mrs. Bloxham*,

with Mr. Bloxham commanding her *Take it off*. Seeking escape from all these fears, which flapped about her mind like black bats' wings, Leonora tried to play the Forest game; but it was no good today. The magic green shade eluded her; the world was much too close.

Perhaps the snakes were part of the trouble. They were hungry, and because the oil-stove was set too high her pen was exceptionally hot. The combination of jungle heat and empty bellies made them both restive, but Catherine as usual was the worse. She wrapped herself round Leonora's right arm and squeezed. She was capable of squeezing quite hard, and meanwhile Leonora had only her left hand free to deal with the mischief of both Cat and Kaa. This occupied all her time, so that she even forgot to keep vigil for the sailor's coming, though she was certain he would appear in her tent before the church clock struck one.

Striving to fend off the snakes, she sweated, and the sun tan trickled in brown runnels down her. She was really worried about Cat. From handling the snakes every day she had achieved some kind of communion with them. She could *feel* Cat's hunger, almost as if it were her own. Cat poured across her now, and Leonora was aware of the

lightness of the snake's body; yet it was tense too, constricted as well as constricting. It made Leonora unhappy to think of Cat's hunger. She could give no comfort to the big snake, though; only a full belly could do that. The tiny mind behind the bright expressionless eyes was utterly remote. And the harder Leonora, moved by compassion, sought with gentleness to soothe her, the more troublesome Cat became, hissing, banging her tail on the floor. The cold-blooded morning flatties had their money's worth, though they knew nothing of the contest between hunger and pity going on in the pen.



The climax came when Cat tried to quarrel with Kaa. Leonora caught hold of her head and twisted her away; but as soon as she let go, Cat in a sudden rage reared up before her. The big blunt head was poised like a hammer; and Leonora sat up straight to push her away. She took hold with both hands and bore down with all her weight, determined to have no more nonsense from Cat; and it was then that she saw the sailor come into her tent.

It was just the same as yesterday, the way his glance spoke to her; but this time the grey eyes asked a question, swiftly and urgently: "Are you all right?" Leonora's little battles with the snakes were always dramatized; her mother, so proud of being an artiste, had taught her the best way to make the flatties cry "Oo!" But the sailor, not being a flatty but a person, was quite capable, she thought, of jumping clean over the canvas barrier to be in the pen at her side!

Leonora's delighted recognition of this was succeeded by dismay lest he should really do so, attracting the attention of Mr. Bloxham outside. Her small tough grin telegraphed "All right" and the sailor nodded acknowledgment: signal received and understood! He walked on round her pen, never peeping nor peering, but taking in everything she felt sure—the beauty of Cat in her splendid rage, the sad aspidistras, the ferns needing water, Leonora's outdoor clothes half hidden under the cushions

"One o'clock?" his glance said as he noticed them; and the semaphore of glances fairly flickered between them:

"One o'clock!"

"Outside the tent!"

"Yes. Wait for me there."

He'd got round almost to the exit before Leonora realized that he must have seen the tattoo between her shoulders when she was leaning forward, fighting with Cat. The knowledge gave her the oddest feeling of hotness there; her back seemed burning, and the sensation must have shown itself in her face, for the sailor's last glance, as he went out, was puzzled, as if for the first time communication had failed between them.

For a whole minute now the tent was empty; and Leonora sat looking at the green jacket which she'd hung upon the canvas barrier when she'd taken it off. Still nobody came in; and she crawled on her

hands and knees to the barrier and reached up for the jacket. She scarcely had time to put it on before a fresh lot of flatties arrived to stare at her. She blinked away the tears which were pricking her eyeballs and smiled at them. Her act of defiance over the jacket cheered her; it engendered a new defiance: Well, he saw it, that silly tattoo, she told herself; and I'm glad he saw it; because now I shall tell him *everything* about the mess I'm in!

The church clock chimed the third quarter: a quarter to one, fifteen minutes more. The two snakes, rebellious as Leonora, had crawled to the oil-stove while she was fetching her jacket. As they basked there they looked like a couple of patterned praying mats, each snake's head at the centre of its closely packed coils. Long ago the trick had earned Catherine her name, for Leonora had pointed out that lying like this she formed a Catherine wheel.

Now Leonora leaned forward swiftly and caught a tail in each hand; she tugged, and the heads rose sizzling out of the coils; for a moment it was like holding the reins of two plunging horses. The flatties laughed at her, and with a sudden lightening of her spirit Leonora laughed back. She felt quite different with the jacket on; as if it were a magic armour. She knew there was a chance that Mr. Bloxham might catch her wearing it. Well, let him! The sailor would be waiting outside for her, and Leonora at least pretended that she wasn't afraid. She repeated to herself: "I'll tell him *everything*!" and the memory of how they had talked without words made her feel so close to him that there seemed nothing odd in her decision to confide in a stranger. She couldn't think of him as a stranger, save in the trifling respect that she didn't know his name.

IT WAS JOE. Petula had found that out already by the time Leonora came running out of her tent at five past one. In a frantic hurry she had shut the snakes in their cage, pulled on her jumper, stepped into her skirt. Her face was still brown from the sun-tan stuff; it would have taken much too long to get it off. She thought she must look like a little monkey.

Petula called: "Here's Joe!"

They were standing in the space between Leonora's tent and the



booth where Petula was tipped out of bed.

Petula said: "I saw him waiting so I knew it must be him. Look, Lee, *he's* brought a picnic too!"

He held paper bags and packages awkwardly in both hands; he was a man accustomed to the kit-bag over his shoulder. He said: "I thought you'd want something to eat, missing your dinner."

"I'll be off now," Petula

said. "I told Joe our picnic was only a pretending one. I'll——"

"No, Pet, please——" Leonora glanced at the sailor, to make sure he didn't mind. "There'll be time for the roundabouts afterwards. We'll show him our churchyard——" and she began to run, with Petula and Joe following her, between the tents and behind them where the cables from the throbbing dynamos lay twined along the gutters—behind the kids' horses—beneath the helter-skelter where girls screamed overhead—across the open space where the chairplanes threw fleeting shadows on to the tarmac—until they came to the wrought-iron gates and the yellowing chestnut trees.

"We'll sit on Eliza," Leonora said.

She was glad to have Petula with her, because she was at first uncertain of herself when it came to talking to Joe in words, and the picnic began rather formally, with Petula politely offering sticky buns and Joe unwrapping his little packets of sandwiches. Each of the packets was written on in a clear round hand: BACON, CHICKEN, TOMATO, JAM. This fascinated Petula, who asked why. Joe shook his head. "I dunno really. It's Mother. She always does it. In case you might eat the jam before the bacon by mistake, I suppose."

There were also hard-boiled eggs, very small ones, which they cracked against Eliza Jenkins's tomb.

"Bantams," said Joe. "Mother keeps them."

There was salt screwed up tight in a roll of paper. There were thick slices of plum cake.

"It's a *real* picnic, isn't it?" said Petula, as wasps, proper to picnics, began to appear from nowhere and buzz about the food. Pigeons, with precognition of crumbs, dropped down from the church roof on to the flagged pathway and strutted there. Cocking their heads sideways, they watched the sailor lay out the packages on the tombstone. No less expectant, Petula watched him too, and wrinkled her nose in thought. She took a deep breath and from her poetry book, which by now she knew by heart, she recited quaintly:

*"It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place."*

Her glance went up to the church tower, wide-eyed in awe of its aptness; then she saw the bewildered look on the sailor's face and she began to giggle. In a moment she had them all laughing, and Leonora, turning towards the sailor, suddenly seemed to share with him, as she had done in her tent, a whole series of private jokes; about Petula, about poetry, about picnics, about sitting on tombstones. Meanwhile, they fell to. The girls opened their mouths and popped in the Bantams' eggs whole. Clutching a sandwich in each hand they nibbled alternately at tomato and chicken, bacon and jam. The bacon was cut almost as thick as the bread. It was quite different from ordinary bacon—salty-sweet, home-cured.

Joe explained: "Mother always keeps a pig." She had baked the bread too, which was crusty and delicious. Leonora had imagined bread always came from bakeries. "Not up our valley," laughed Joe. "The women put the dough to warm in front of the fire and when it rises it swells and swells till it's like a—like a fat baby lying there! Mother bakes twice a week, always."

Petula asked questions with her mouth full; Leonora was content to listen to the answers. Joe's father had been drowned early in the last war. He was a trawlerman. It was an aeroplane sank him. Joe was nine then. They'd had eight evacuee kids in the whitewashed cottage

half-way up the mountain—Lor' knows where Mother put them all! It was her idea to get a bit of her own back on Hitler.

Now they're all grown up and married and they bring *their* kids to the cottage for the holidays. Mother squeezes them in. Like stray cats—she never turns them away. You ought to see our cats. They're always having kittens but of course Mother won't drown the kittens, not she. Cats everywhere! And the Bantams. And the ducks. And the pony. Mother drives it in the trap to go shopping. And a few Kerry ewes and lambs up on the mountain. And a collie to fetch 'em down with. And the pig of course. Have another bacon sandwich?

The sailor sat on the tombstone between Petula and Leonora. Now and then he smiled from one to the other in frank admiration and amazement, that girls so small should be able to eat so much. The sun shone; the moss on Eliza's tombstone felt as warm as a cat's coat when Leonora surreptitiously wiped her hands on it. They soon got sticky again from the plum cake, which had orange icing with sugary slices of candied orange arranged on top. There was still apple-pie. There were biscuits, with real butter spread on them that glistened with tiny drops, buttercup-yellow, quite different from the Men's Butter in Mrs. Bloxham's larder. There was some pale sharp-tasting cheese. There were William pears.

"To think," sighed Petula, when there wasn't a scrap left—"to think she packed all that food for just the *two* of you!"

"With Mother, it's a sort of hobby," said Joe modestly, "feeding folks."

Petula stood up. "My tummy's as tight as a drum," she said smugly. As her hands ran down her dress, brushing off the crumbs, Leonora could see the roundness of her tummy, and so could the sailor, for he caught Leonora's eye and smiled.

Petula said, "I feel like one of your snakes, Lee, when it's bulging."

Always when the snakes swallowed a chicken it was a hard lump within them for quite a long time: this lump gradually descended and got smaller, travelling round the coils of the gorged and sleepy snake, "like a train," said Petula, "going round and round in a tunnel." Leonora was reminded of Cat with the ache in her belly.

"Oh, Pet, he hasn't fed them for eight days!"

"Old Scrooge, I told you," said Petula.

Leonora saw the sailor glance up at Petula sharply.

"Might they hurt Lee if they're hungry?"

"Goodness no!" Leonora laughed. "But they might eat a cat if they could catch one. Catherine did once."

"How long can they go without food?"

"Kaa went a fortnight once; but that was when he was sick, because of the cold weather. I took him to a vet," said Leonora, "in my suit-case. You ought to have seen the vet jump when I opened it!"

Joe laughed. Then he said: "This Mr. Bloxham—why doesn't he feed them?"

"Too stingy," Petula burst out.

"And I think he hates all animals," Leonora said.

Petula explained: "He used to tame tigers once. They'd have eaten him if some men hadn't come with pitchforks."

"You wouldn't mind much if they had?" asked Joe almost harshly, not smiling at all.

Petula shook her head. "He'd have been a great treat to tigers," she said, "like chocolate cream to us."

"Why don't you girls leave him?" Joe's question came quickly, and his look was hard as he asked it. Leonora had seen that look before: last night when he was facing up to Bill.

"One of these fine mornings," said Petula airily, "he won't see me for smoke! But for Lee, you see, it's difficult——"

"Why is it——?"

He had been going to say "Why is it difficult?" and he turned to Leonora so quickly that he intercepted her frown at Petula, as she warned her not to talk about Bill. He broke off suddenly and for a fraction of a second his unfinished question seemed to hang in the air. Then a surprising thing happened. With thoughtful deliberation, he nodded. It was as if he said to Leonora: "Yes, of course; it is difficult," but the simple gesture had a courtesy beyond words. She guessed that he was thinking of last night, when Bill had said to her, *Git on in*, and that he was remembering the tattoo between her shoulders, which he'd seen this morning; he was putting two and two together; perhaps already he understood about the trap she'd fallen into!

And now there came just the shade of a smile, oddly diffident, as if he apologized for knowing what he knew: the shy smile of one who

stands on your doorstep and isn't sure whether you will welcome him in. She desperately wanted to welcome him in, but she didn't know how to. Then, luckily, the church clock chimed. It set the pigeons a-flutter, and Petula with them.

"Half past one! Thank you for the picnic, Joe." She put out her hand to him, curiously formal, and Joe took it with a matching formality. "You can tip me out of bed this afternoon," she said. "I do a special somersault for friends. . . . Be quick, now, or you'll miss your roundabouts."

Leonora was wondering if she ought to ask Petula to come with them, but already she had run towards the church door. Under the porch it was dark with a cool darkness, and Petula's face as she glanced back at them peered out of it like an imp's into the sunlight.

"The clergyman said we could go in, didn't he? And I haven't been in one, ever. I say, Lee——"

"Yes, Pet?"

"Remember my poem, happy as kings!" Laughing, she scuttled into the church. The last of the clock chimes was still quivering in the sky. Leonora looked at Joe, forlorn for a moment now that Petula had left them. She hadn't anything to say. Then he gave her another of those comprehending smiles, and suddenly it seemed quite natural to put her arm in his, as they went between the solemn chestnuts towards the clamour of the Fair.

IN THE chairoplane the clamour died away. Each time it dipped earthward, the confused noises of the Fair seemed to bark at them, and then their little carriage soared off once more into the swishing quietness. For five minutes they had been alone together in the carriage. They'd had a long free ride, for the man in greasy overalls, smiling broadly, had refused Joe's shilling because Leonora belonged to the Fair. Indeed they hadn't paid for anything, neither the roundabouts nor the helter-skelter nor the Ghost Train nor the coco-nut shy, and Gipsy Lee standing outside her tent had offered them a Fortune for nothing. They had sped round the Fair on feet as light as their spirits, and wherever they went there had been laughter following them like an echo of their own laughter—Gipsy Lee's deep chuckle, Connie's

banter as they left her coco-nut shy, the cheerful chi-acking of the roundabout men. Even grumpy old Wilf, whose face as he wound the wheel for the kids' horses was usually as long as a wet week, glanced up and grinned as they ran past him hand in hand. Looking back as they climbed on to the roundabouts, Leonora was astonished to see him wave.

Perhaps, she thought, it seemed a good joke to the Fair folk that she should have turned herself into a flatty for half an hour!—she didn't realize that all the smiling faces were as looking-glasses reflecting hers and Joe's. They had found something new to laugh at, every minute; but alas, the minutes had ticked round more quickly than Leonora's white steed with arched neck and scarlet nostrils had revolved to a twenty-year-old tune.

Joe had lifted her down from it, his big hands about her waist; and it was a quarter to two when they got into the chairplane and sailed off into the sky. Up, up, up, until Leonora could look across the Fair-ground at the clock on the church tower, with its golden minute hand

pointing right at the middle of the IX; down, down, so fast that she left her inside behind her, diving towards the candy-striped tent-tops; up again, higher than the back-street houses, higher than the handsome white lion on top of the porch of the White Lion Commercial Hotel; down towards the roundabouts, one sharp astonishing yelp of concentrated noise; then up and away and the church clock coming into view again, its golden hand giving a twitch, as if it shrugged another minute away.

But very soon Leonora stopped looking out of the little



carriage in which she sat side by side with Joe. As the carriage banked steeply she slid willy-nilly against him. He put his arm round her then, but diffidently, and when she caught the rail in front of her and straightened herself in the seat he quickly let her go. They were climbing up into the quietness, and there would be enough seconds of silence, she thought, to say the one thing she still needed to say to Joe. Even though he must know what she was going to tell him, she felt it would trouble her if she did not say it in so many words.

"About Bill," she said. "Bill and me." She didn't quite look at Joe, but she could see his face turned gravely towards her.

"We was going to be married," she said. "I wanted to tell you."

For answer Joe did a surprising thing. He stretched out his hand and lifted the back of her jumper. She felt his fingers on the tattoo mark between her shoulder blades, and with shyness or delight she trembled at his touch. "It'll come off, you know," he said.

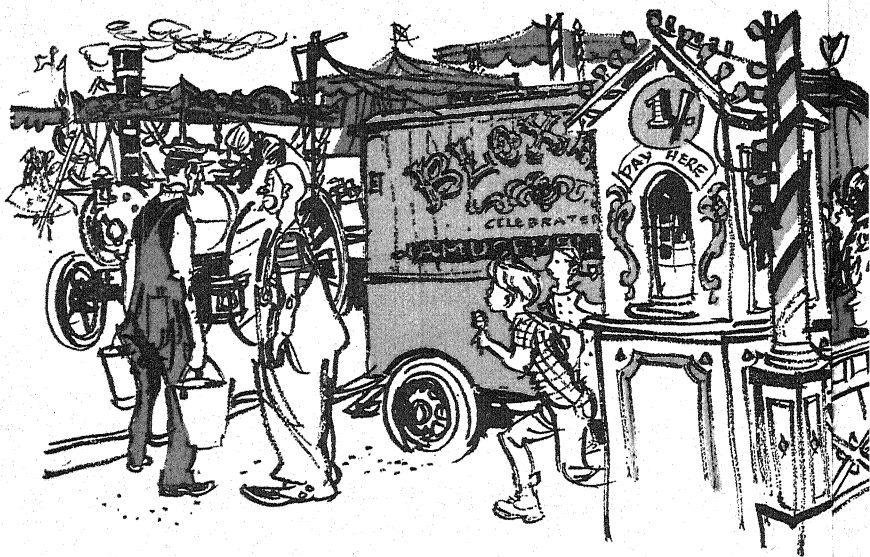
She turned towards him then, and he was laughing. She let go of the rail and leaned back, pressing his hand still under her jumper between her shoulders and the seat, and now she laughed too.

"I thought it wouldn't ever."

"Oh yes it will!" he said again. "It *will* come off, honest. Chap in my ship had it done." Then they were back into the noise so she just rested her head contentedly on his shoulder. It didn't seem to matter, now that she had told him about Bill, that his arm was tight about her; she let it stay there, and they were at ease in the privacy of the carriage, which was surely as private a place as the Garden of Eden when only Adam and Eve inhabited it.

The unfamiliar feeling of being cut off from the world delighted Leonora; for here she was alone with Joe in a way she had never been with anybody before. In the caravan nothing she did was unseen, nothing she said was not overheard; even when she went out with Bill there was nowhere to go, save the back streets of strange towns, all alike in the dark nights, with scurrying cats and late loungers under street lamps and couples cuddling in tenement doorways.

But the chairplane bore her towards the wide brightness of the sky! It was as if she and Joe had sailed right away from the world. She caught a glimpse, as the carriage swung high, of the roof of Mrs. Bloxham's caravan, its small chimney fluffed with smoke, and thought of



Mrs. Bloxham cooking there, and burning things. She thought, with unaccustomed smugness, of Ivy sitting hungrily at the table, and Mr. Bloxham sniffing the burnt smell, all ready to complain. She almost said to herself: Ivy, you'd never guess where I am now—Ha, ha, Mr. B., you can't catch *me*!

For two whole revolutions Leonora forgot the inexorable clock. Joe was telling her about his ship, and about a voyage to Bangkok. Leonora tried to imagine the ship; she saw it brightly painted, high out of the water against a glittering sea. "Where's Bangkok?"

"Siam," he said, and she smiled, "Twins."

"There's temples," said Joe, "Buddhist temples and shrines."

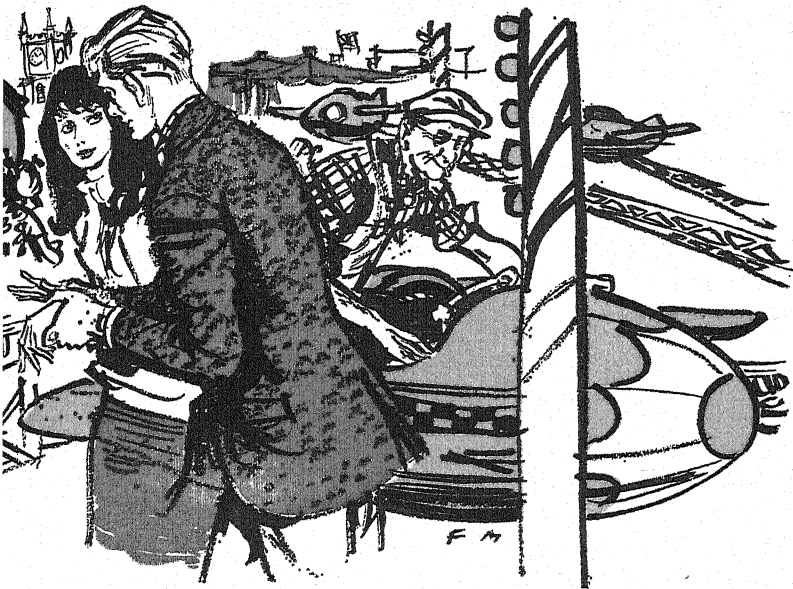
"Forests too, I expect?"

"Forests and swamps. You steam past them for twenty miles up the river."

"Wild animals?" she said.

"You never see them."

"I bet they see *you*"—and she thought with tenderness of the secret animals peering out of the Forest at Joe sailing by in his painted ship.



"Tell you what," he said, "there's monkeys."

"In the trees?"

"Swinging and chattering in the trees."

"With my face browned," she said, "I must look like a monkey."

He turned, smiling, to look at her, and they were climbing up towards the sun, it was bright in her eyes. But she saw Joe's smile suddenly fade, she was aware of the intensity of his look as he touched the bruise beneath her eye. She guessed he hadn't seen it before, she'd put on such a lot of powder. Joe spoke so quietly that she could scarcely hear him above the swishing of the wind. "He hit you?"

For a fraction of a second the carriage seemed to pause at the top of its trajectory, and hang there in the very eye of the sun. Joe's finger-tip just brushed her cheek once more, and it was the gentleness of his touch that started her tears. She put her head down and pretended to shade her eyes from the brightness. Joe said: "*Last night, because of me*, he hit you," and there was sheer astonishment in his tone, as if he could not believe it possible that anybody under heaven should have struck Leonora.

Then the carriage fell in its headlong dive towards the roundabouts; the noise came up to meet them, with half a bar of "I Want to Be Happy" mixed up in it. Petula's poem flashed into Leonora's mind: Happy as kings—and she couldn't hide her tears any longer. She felt Joe's arm tighten round her shoulders and suddenly she was clinging to him, like a little monkey indeed, and sobbing against the rough tweed of his jacket. He held her, not speaking, while the carriage rose again and fell again, two complete turns before she tugged herself free and saw the radiance of the sky rainbow-coloured through her tears. She blinked them away, and there was the church clock, seeming to frown at her.

Ten to two!—and there was no sign of the chairplane slowing down. All the bats'-wing fears came flapping back into Leonora's mind. "I'll be late!" she cried, pointing at the clock. Gone was her wonderful feeling of having sailed right out of the world. The world was waiting for her down below. She tried saying to herself: "They can't kill me for it"; the phrase was a talisman but now she discovered that it didn't work any more, there were worse things than being killed—there was parting from Joe, there was being alone again. In panic she turned to him, just as the carriage was plummeting down into the noise, so she couldn't hear what he said. Then they were flying upward, and he took both her hands in his to pull her towards him, and they were back where the wind sighed round them.

"It won't matter any more," Joe was saying. "You've got to do what Petula said—run away!"

"But *where?*" she cried, and just then she felt the sudden slowing down of the machine; they were coming to earth at last.

"Home!"

She thought he meant her home, and shook her head. Then he said: "Mother's," and she was seeing the cottage she'd never set eyes on as if it were really home: the pony, the cats, the collie, the pig, the old woman who loved feeding folk.

"But she wouldn't——?"

"Mother likes it best when folk come unexpected," smiled Joe.

But a girl he'd picked up at the Fair, a caravan girl—what would she think about that? And what about the snakes? And what would happen when Joe went off to sea next week? If she had had time to think,

surely she would never have said "I'll come!" But there were only seconds left, she could feel the machine shuddering as the brakes came on, the carriage swung low, she could almost see people's faces and she had a sudden unreasonable fancy that Mr. Bloxham was among them in his top-hat, waiting for her, *Take them things off and git on in.*

"I'll come but——"

"The snakes?" Joe said. "I've been thinking." They couldn't take the snakes on the back of the motor-bike, he said, but tomorrow he'd come in and fetch them in a friend's car. That queer hard look came back into his face for a moment when he told her: "I'll come in and fetch them"; but he was smiling again when he said, "Snakes'll be something quite new to Mother."

Close to the ground now, the carriage was moving round at walking pace, and the man in overalls stood with his arms up ready to catch it. The Fair noise was surging all round them, and they had to raise their voices above it. And they must be quick!

"But I'll have to tell Petula. And I'll have to pack my suit-case!"

"When?" he said.

"When it's dark." She'd be afraid to do it in the day-time, afraid they'd catch her. "When the Fair's over," she said. "Just after eleven. But where, Joe, where?"

He thought quickly. "That pub we saw—White Lion. By the porch. I'll be there with the bike, waiting."

The man in overalls had his hands on the carriage. He pulled it towards him so that they could step out. The ground was unsteady under Leonora's feet; for a moment it was as if she felt the great globe turning, and Joe held her steady. "Hold up!" laughed the chairplane man. "Bet you dunno whether you're on your head or your heels."

BY A STROKE of luck, Mr. Bloxham was late this afternoon: perhaps Mrs. Bloxham had had another catastrophe with the cooking. So Leonora was all ready with her snakes in the pen, when he poked his head round the flap at half past two. She hadn't dared to put on the green jacket, she would do nothing to provoke him now! She sat in her pen demure and submissive while he gazed at her through the opening with expressionless eyes. "Ah, so you got over your tantrums," he said at

last. A moment later he was wah-wukking on his soap-box outside: Talk about the Garden of Eden and the Serpent, all of you blokes as 'as got a bit of the old Adam in you, walk up and get an eyeful of Eve——

Within a few minutes the flatties came in droves; it must be early-closing day in the town. Cat kept Leonora busy; restive, she ranged about the pen as if she hunted for food. She upset the fern pots and nearly knocked over the oil-stove. Her tongue flickered most of the time, because she was so hungry. Leonora wouldn't have given much for the chances of a mere church-mouse if one had appeared in her pen this afternoon! But of course no such titbit came Catherine's way; instead a silly woman crumbled a bun into the pen. "What, don't they eat buns?" she demanded resentfully.

"No, they *don't!*" said Leonora, who every night had to sweep up ham sandwiches and gingerbread.

"Unnatural things."

Leonora didn't mind not wearing the jacket this afternoon. She didn't mind when a woman said to her husband, quite nastily: "Keep your eyes on the snakes, Alfred." She scarcely noticed the flatties most of the time. She was thinking about Joe, remembering his slow smile, living again those moments in the chairplane.

It was hard to believe that the trap didn't hold her any longer; the way out lay open, in nine hours she would be free! She was a little frightened, especially when she reckoned that it was only twenty-four hours since she'd first seen Joe. But it seemed years. She had to persuade herself that it wasn't a dream; for when she closed her eyes now she no longer saw the green Forest, but a green hillside instead, with a whitewashed cottage like a doll's house, woolly white sheep like picture-book sheep, a curly-tailed pig, brown Bantam hens, an old russet-faced woman crossing a farmyard, followed by many cats with umbrella-handle tails. . . .

In no time, it seemed, Leonora was counting the strokes as the church clock struck five.

And now the problem was close at hand. How was she to pack up her things during the tea break without Mrs. Bloxham knowing? For of course the girls always had tea with her in the caravan. Her suit-case was in the cupboard under her bed: so were her few clothes, with Joe's

rabbit, and the goldfish in its bowl. Somehow or other, between five thirty and six thirty, she must pack the suit-case, take it across to her tent, and hide it there.

This apparently insoluble problem nagged at her mind until the clock chimed again, and the last of the flatties filed out as Mr. Bloxham called through the tent flap, "Tea, gel." She put away the snakes and dressed; her heart was pounding as she went past Mr. Bloxham's caravan. He had been washing his hands in a bucket of water, and he was in his shirt sleeves but still wearing his top-hat tilted on the back of his head. Ivy lounged against the caravan, with a cigarette dangling from her lips; he was showing her the long jagged scars on his forearm where the tiger had clawed him. "His skin's inside there," he said, "and every time I wipes my feet on it I says to him, 'I'm still alive, matey, and you've 'ad it.' " He was genial, almost jolly, because the takings had been good today.

Bill came out of the caravan, in his sky-blue dressing-gown on which Leonora had embroidered a big "B" the day after they were tattooed, months ago. The bandages were loosely wrapped round his hands. Ivy went to tie them but he turned away from her and held out his hands to Leonora. "Tie 'em and tape 'em."

She often did this for him—across the palm, behind the thumb, a turn round the wrist. She kept her head down; she didn't dare look at his face. She felt in his dressing-gown pocket for the roll of adhesive tape. Her fingers were trembling so much that she could scarcely hold it. "Git on with it," he grumbled impatiently.

Mr. Bloxham had dried his hands and now he picked up the shrunken head, Charlie, whom he always hung up by day on the back door of his caravan. There he thought Charlie had a better chance of predicting the weather. "Going to rain," he said. "What'll you bet me, Bill, as it don't rain before eleven?"

Leonora almost jumped when he said "Eleven"; it was as if he knew. For a second or two she was paralysed by fear; she fumbled with the tape, terribly aware of Bill's hand under her fingers, the hand that had struck her, the hand that had caressed. Her pity was strong for him, but now she recognized it as pity and not love. She wanted to explain to him why she was going; it was awful to leave him without a good-bye. But she dared not tell him. If she did, he would stop her. The trap

would close again, and this time it would shut for ever. There would never be another chance, never another Joe walking casually into her tent and into her life! Bill said: "Your fingers is all thumbs. What the hell's the matter?"

Ivy said: "You ought to let me do it."

"Lee brings me luck," he said.

"Don't I?" said Ivy, almost under her breath.

Bill didn't say anything, he just glanced at her over his shoulder and turned back to Leonora. Mr. Bloxham put on his tail-coat. Jocular, he tilted his hat at a new angle. "Come along, then, Battler; them White Hopes is waiting for you to knock 'em down like ninepins!" Bill shrugged his shoulders. He used to prance about while he got dressed for fighting, shadow-boxing, making faces at imaginary opponents. He didn't want to fight nowadays, Leonora thought; he might even be afraid.

Somehow, at last, she taped the bandages, and Bill went off with Mr. Bloxham towards the boxing booth. Ivy started to go after them, then she stopped and turned to Leonora. "Ain't you coming?"

Ivy often had her tea early so that she could spend half an hour in the boxing booth. She enjoyed seeing people knocked about, Leonora thought.

"Don't you like watching it?"

Leonora shook her head. She hadn't minded, once, when Bill had seemed to her a kind of shining hero, and the others had all been her enemies because they were his.

"I like it," said Ivy.

She was looking hard at Leonora and hating her. The cigarette hung from her lower lip as if it was stuck there. Her little eyes were wicked as she said, "Where were you at dinnertime, duckie?"

"Pet and I went on a picnic."

"Picnic my foot," said Ivy. "I saw you on the horses. Who's your fancy flatty? My, ain't we growing up!"

Then she ran off to join Bill and Mr. Bloxham. She ran like a duck, with her high-heeled shoes kicking out sideways. When she caught up with Bill she put her arm in his. She was telling him something—about seeing Leonora on the horses, probably, because she wanted him for herself. But Leonora knew that whoever got him Ivy wouldn't:

he'd have his fun with Ivy, and then finish, because he wanted something else which Ivy could never give.

Pity for him tormented her as she ran to Mrs. Bloxham's caravan; and she hesitated for a moment on the step. But she supposed it didn't matter now whatever Ivy told him. And it was lucky for her that Ivy was out of the way; for now she was up against the problem of packing her suit-case without Mrs. Bloxham seeing.

As things turned out, it was surprisingly easy. Mrs. Bloxham had taken it into her head to make toast for tea. Years of unhappy experience had demonstrated to her that if for one second she turned her back the toast would burst into flame; so she leaned over the gas cooker with acute anxiety. Leonora had time to tell Petula her plan: one whispered sentence, the words tumbling over each other: "Pet, I'm going home with Joe after the Fair and I've got to pack—help me, don't let her see."

Petula's reaction to this fortified Leonora's respect for poetry. She closed her poetry book deliberately, wrinkled her nose in thought, and then said loudly: "Mrs. Bloxham, I've got an eyelash in my eye, please help me get it out." She went to Mrs. Bloxham, who turned away from the stove. Half a minute later, as Leonora rummaged in the cupboard under the bed, she heard Petula say, "Mrs. B., your toast is burning."

There were the usual agitated cries from Mrs. Bloxham. Leonora stuffed the rabbit into her suit-case, with her clothes and her odds and ends—she'd have to leave the goldfish for Petula to feed. She had nearly finished when Mrs. Bloxham called out: "You got to wait, Lee, I can't help it, it's the gas burns it, I'll make some more." This was her cue to slip out with the suit-case. She carried it into her tent, hid it in the farthest corner where there was always a deep shadow, and covered it with the old towel which she used to wipe off her sun tan. The church clock began to strike six; she had half an hour to spare! She felt excited, curiously guilty, and yet triumphant.

Then all at once she realized that somebody was standing in the entrance of the tent. She crouched in terror beside the suit-case until the scratch of a match compelled her to turn her head. She did not know why she had expected to see Mr. Bloxham, tall in his top-hat, silhouetted against the last light of the day; her fear of him was so great that she was almost glad it was Ivy, small, cocky and sly as she

lit a cigarette. Ivy was standing very still, as if she had been watching her. She puffed at her cigarette, and then said: "Looked for you but you weren't in the caravan. Something you mightn't want to miss. Better hurry, though. In the boxing booth. New boy friend challenges ex-boy friend. Blimey, Helen of Troy."

Leonora got up then, but she didn't understand what Ivy meant. She went across the tent to her, and she saw Ivy looking beyond her towards the suit-case on the floor. She was grinning all over her face. "Ain't you coming?" Ivy said. "To see your flatty taking a bash at Bill?"

Leonora cried out, "He isn't!" Why should Joe——? Then she remembered the way Joe had said, "*He hit you,*" and how his face had gone hard as he said it.

Ivy's eyes mocked Leonora. "Old Bloxham says his piece; and up steps your flatty. But there's a little runt of a chap just beats him to it. Bloxham says to your flatty: 'You'll be next on the list, Mister,' and Bill sets about the little runt. But you ought to of seen Bill's face when he caught sight of your bloke. Coo, like the films!" Ivy giggled. "Can't you take it, softie?" she said. "Ain't you coming?"

Leonora didn't want to go with her. She was frightened of Ivy, and she drew back into the tent. Ivy said, "Please yourself: *I ain't a-going to miss it,*" and ducked through the tent flap. Then Leonora thought that there might still be time for her to stop Joe—and she was running after Ivy as if her feet compelled her though her mind still warned her not to go. She caught up with her, and Ivy suddenly said out of the side of her mouth: "So you're quitting this joint?"

Then Leonora was sure that Ivy had been watching while she hid the suit-case under the towel. She didn't answer, and Ivy said: "I don't blame you. It's a rotten joint. You needn't worry, I won't blab." Leonora knew that she wouldn't, because she wanted Bill.

They heard the shouting long before they got to the boxing booth. Ivy began to run when she heard it, she took Leonora by the arm and almost dragged her into the booth. There was something ominous about the shouting; it rose and fell, and now it mounted to a crescendo. Leonora wanted to run away, but Ivy tugged her into a clear space, and she couldn't help seeing what was happening.

The first thing she saw was the expression on Mr. Bloxham's face.

Up there on the raised dais with his top-hat nearly touching the electric lamps he looked monstrous, inhuman, like some awful waxwork thing. Beneath the bright lights his face streaming with sweat was the colour of wax, and Leonora had the odd fancy that it was slowly melting. It seemed to sag with a kind of horrified despair.

Then she saw Joe with his back to her, in his vest with grey trousers. His arms and the back of his neck were very brown against the white vest. His shoulders were working and she knew that Bill was beyond him, in the corner, and he was punching Bill. She could hear the blows thudding, and somebody grunting.

Bill suddenly staggered out from behind Joe; it looked as if Joe had deliberately stood aside to let him out of the corner. Bill's head was down, and he held both hands up before him defencelessly—the palms of his gloves were open, there was blood all over his face. Joe was poised on his toes and his right glove was warily up to his chin, but his left was drawn back, and Leonora cried out, for she knew he was going to drive that left at the side of Bill's unprotected jaw.

Nobody noticed her cry; they were all yelling, shouting to Joe, urging him to go in and finish it. Leonora found Ivy's hand in hers, and amid her confusion and dismay she was aware of surprise. Joe sprang at Bill, his fist shot forward, and it was coming from Bill's right, the side where he couldn't see properly, the side where the golden fountains were. Leonora felt Ivy's long sharp nails digging into her palm.

Then suddenly Joe stopped dead. For a fraction of a second Leonora believed that she *had* been able to communicate with him somehow, for his hands had fallen to his sides and he was looking at Bill in a puzzled way and slowly shaking his head. The yelling ceased; there was a strange silence in the tent. Bill tottered on for a few paces and then he stood still, his gloves held up in front of his eyes. Joe said something to Mr. Bloxham, and Mr. Bloxham stared at him. Joe pointed at Bill, shrugged his shoulders and once again shook his head. Then Mr. Bloxham almost ran to the ropes. The people were beginning to boo and he shouted at the top of his voice: "The gent in the vest says he's had enough, so the fight goes to Battler."

He gabbled on but Leonora could only hear a word or two. Everybody seemed to be booing now, in a horrible calculated way, soft and loud alternately, *Boo-boo*, *boo-boo*, *boo-boo*; Leonora didn't know if

they were booing Joe for refusing to finish the fight, or Bill as he went very slowly towards his corner and sat there with his gloves still covering his face.

Leonora whispered: "Ivy, I've got to get out." But Ivy still gripped her tight. In the ring Mr. Bloxham was leaning over Bill, saying something, and Bill looked up at him and nodded. Leonora had a sickening glimpse of his ravaged face with the fear and the failure written all over it.

Joe had put on his shirt and jacket. He looked puzzled still; he must have guessed something was wrong with Bill—that was why he had stopped fighting at the moment when he could have knocked him out; but he couldn't know about the golden fountains, and the blows that came out of the dark. Only Leonora knew about that. Bill hadn't told his father, he hadn't told Ivy—not even though he had made love to Ivy, thought Leonora, curiously unresentful. Only she knew *why Bill couldn't box any more*.

Leonora forced herself to look up at the ring where Bill sat slumped in his corner. She recognized amid all her confusion that the confidence had bound her to him. It was an intimacy closer than any he might have had with Ivy, and, rebelling against it, her heart seemed to cry out: "Oh, why did you have to tell me, Bill?"

Joe at that very moment was jumping down into the crowd. He hadn't seen her there, and she didn't want him to see her; she thought it would break her heart if she had to speak to him now. For his look would say "Eleven? Outside the White Lion?" using the unspoken language which was theirs alone. How swift, how certain her response would have been only ten minutes ago—"Eleven! You bet! White Lion!"

But Leonora knew that because of what had happened she could no longer make that reply. She said to Ivy again, more urgently: "I've got to get out. Please, Ivy, let me go"; but Ivy didn't answer and now Leonora saw that she was crying. Her face, as she turned towards Leonora, looked like that of a painted doll which had been left out in the rain. It amazed Leonora that Ivy should cry.

Then Ivy let go of her hand. She gave Leonora a kind of grin and said: "Get off with you, duckie. . . . About you quitting, don't worry, I won't blab."

Leonora had almost fought her way to the exit when she heard Mr. Bloxham's voice harsh and loud—it pulled her up abruptly. "Ladies and gents: I have to make an announcement. On account of an old cut opening over the Battler's eye there'll be no more fighting this evening. But fatten up your young champs"—Leonora identified in his tone the terrible jocularity of despair—"fatten 'em up for the slaughter when Battler comes back to your dear old city, this time next year."

Leonora wriggled out through the press of muttering people, and ran as fast as she could towards her tent. It was a quarter past six when she got there, and she proceeded to do automatically all the things which she did every day at a quarter past six. She went behind the tent where the snakes' cage stood, she took the cover off it and picked up Kaa. She carried him into the pen and went back to the cage and fetched Catherine. She turned up the wick of the oil-stove. She drew the tent flap across the entrance and hitched it there. She took off her jumper and skirt and laid them in the corner of her pen. She uncorked the sun-tan bottle and smeared some of the stuff on her arms and shoulders, where the jumper always rubbed it off.

Until now she had scarcely realized that she was doing these things. But suddenly it struck her, when she was putting away the sun-tan bottle, that this should have been the last time she did so. The thought that she would be doing the same things again tomorrow, and all the other days, was almost more than she could bear. She ran to her suitcase hidden in the corner, and pulled the towel off it, as if the sight of it might renew her resolution to run away. But it was no good; it only made her cry a little.

She tried something else. She shut her eyes, that old game of hers, and looked not at the Forest but at the future, as Gipsy Lee might see it in her crystal, but clear, oh so clear that she could make out the lettering on the iced cake Mrs. B. would make for them when she and Bill got spliced, as he would put it, and she could hear Mr. Bloxham proposing their health in a jocular manner and saying, Kid, I'm your old father-in-law now, you can give me a kiss. Leonora made herself see it all, Mrs. Bloxham turning to her with that queer little smile, and Bill drinking more and more because of the golden fountains, and the way she would learn to jump at his voice when he shouted at her, as she already did at his father's. *He wants you for his Mrs. Bloxham.* He

would want the Ivys too, there would always be an Ivy in the offing somewhere, but they wouldn't mend his clothes and cook him something special on Sundays and start when he said, Git and do it.

She saw it all, with dreadful clarity, and then she opened her eyes and the suit-case was there ready packed at her feet, and still she knew that she wasn't going. She stood by the suit-case and thought of Joe with a kind of tender reproach: If only you hadn't fought him, Joe, or if only he had beaten *you*! It was funny to think it would have been all right if Joe had lost the fight—she'd have been outside the White Lion with her suit-case at five past eleven.

She would have to get Petula to take a message to Joe.

So Leonora shut the door of her own trap once and for all, locked it, bolted and barred it, no escape now, ever.

Carrying the suit-case, she went slowly across the tent towards the entrance. Suddenly the tent flap was tugged open, so that she heard the canvas rip, and Bill stood before her, in his dressing-gown, with the blood caked round his eye. "So there you are." He caught her wrist and dragged her towards him and she dropped the suit-case.

She cried out: "It's all right, Bill—I'm not going!" for it was in her mind that Ivy had told him she was about to run away. Too late she realized her mistake. Ivy hadn't told him—why should she? Ivy still wanted him for herself, failure or not; she had cried when he was beaten. Bill said: "Going—what d'you mean? Who said you was going?" Then he saw the suit-case on the ground behind her. Confused from the fight, he still didn't understand, and Leonora could sense him puzzling. The grip of his hand on her wrist got tighter, and then slowly he began to twist her wrist. Leonora kept her head down and tried not to scream, but she knew he was staring at the suit-case and in his slow mind working it all out about Joe.

And now through the pain it came clear as day to Leonora that Ivy must have told Bill she had seen her with Joe on the roundabouts. He had come to her tent to take it out of her for that.

"So that's it?" he said suddenly; and she knew that at last he saw the meaning of the suit-case.

Her arm hurt so much that she screamed: "I'm not going, now!"

Bill said: "No, that you ain't. What did I tell you about flatties last night? What did I tell you?"

She thought that because of his shame and his anger at all that had happened to him he didn't know what he was doing. She believed he was going to break her arm. Then suddenly he let it go, and she realized he meant to hit her. She dodged out of reach of his hand. She was close to the gate of her pen, and she took refuge inside it. Bill followed, blundering. She tried to plead with him but he lunged out at her and she ran into the corner of the pen. She cowered there, and he came after her, and she caught sight of Catherine coiled close to the oil-stove. She seized Catherine, and lifted her up, holding her towards Bill. She felt Catherine's tail whip round her leg and clasp it. Catherine's head shot forward right into Bill's face. He staggered back. Leonora thought he hadn't known the snakes were in the pen, or he wouldn't have followed her, he had such a horror of them. He yelled: "Put it down!"

But Leonora clung to Catherine. The snake hissed, and her head went backward and forward with its piston movement. She was in a rage of hunger and fear. Leonora, as she gripped Cat's neck between her strong hands, could feel the spasm in it, and she knew that their own fear, hers and Bill's, had communicated itself to Catherine. All about the pen there was an almost physical aura of fear.

She heard Kaa moving close to her feet. He made a dry scraping sound on the canvas floor. She glanced down at Kaa, and when she looked up again she saw the stick raised in Bill's hand.

It was Mr. Bloxham's stick, the one he stood in the corner of her pen for fear of the creepy-crawlies. Leonora thought Bill meant to hit her with it: he looked mad and terrible under the single green light, with the blood dark round his eye. She didn't understand that he had picked up the stick to defend himself against Catherine; when the blow fell it was aimed at Cat's head, but it hit her own wrist and the pain was so sharp that she let go of the snake. It dropped heavily to the floor and the impetus carried it a little way towards Bill, who in a sudden frenzy of fear began to beat it about the head.

Leonora turned away in sick horror. She heard the blows falling and she hid her face in her hands. When she looked again, Cat's head was raised up from the floor and her neck was arched like a swan's. Leonora knew that she was seeing the last of the living beauty of Cat. With exquisite grace Cat's neck rose up from her coils and the dappled head hung from it like a heavy flower upon its stem. Leonora cried "Stop!"

but she knew Cat was dying. A ripple ran through the whole length of the snake, her head fell sideways upon the floor, and then she lay, full length, upon her back.

Bill dropped the stick. He muttered something, she thought it was "Brute," then he went out of the pen and through the tent flap, and Leonora knelt down beside Cat. She heard Bill retching outside.

She touched Cat, and for the first time she experienced horror as she touched her. In death Cat was ugly, and Leonora found herself wondering where Beauty fled to when something died.

She lay on the floor of her pen and wept for Cat. At last she heard Mr. Bloxham calling from outside the tent. "Ready, gel?"

She responded to his voice with a small twitch of fear, as Mrs. Bloxham did, as the tigers doubtless had done, day after day until the day they mauled him. Mr. Bloxham called again, more sharply: "Ready, gel? Ain't you ready?"

A habit of obedience brought her to her feet. She managed to call back: "In a minute. Give me a minute," without knowing why she pleaded for time. It was as if her mind had been battered like Cat's poor head, all the thinking beaten out of it. She stood there in a daze, and gradually through her bewilderment she realized that the pen was bare save for the ferns, the FIDO bowl, the oil-stove; Kaa wasn't there.

The gate was open, as Bill had left it. Leonora darted through, looking for Kaa. Her mind was quick again suddenly, and a kind of intuition sent her glance towards the dark corner of the tent, where she had hidden her suit-case. It was the darkest place, and snakes sought darkness always. She was only just in time. She did not see Kaa, but she saw a chink of light which showed for a fraction of a second between the skirt of the tent and the ground. Then the canvas fell back into place, and she knew that Kaa had crawled through.

Mr. Bloxham was grumbling outside, "Why the 'ell ain't you ready?" but she scarcely heard him, she had one clear purpose in her mind now which was to recover Kaa. She ran to the back of the tent and went down on her hands and knees, and wriggled out the way he had gone, under the canvas.

All the brightness had gone out of the sky, and it was dusk already, the lights were lit all over the Fair. When she saw Kaa, it was as something faintly glistening that trickled down the slope of the tarmac

towards the gutter behind the side shows. She ran from her tent and pounced on him. She had him by the tail, and his head whipped back towards her, *Sss!* Then he wrapped himself round her arm.

As she knelt there panting she was aware of the tarmac wet beneath her knees, and of light rain falling. The raindrops were cold on her bare shoulders. The tempo of the Fair, quickening as night fell, clamoured in her ears, there were wild yells and shrieks of laughter mixed with the blare of the roundabouts; away on her left a rout of Teddy-boys were dodging among the guy-ropes, chasing some girls and uttering shrill wolf whistles. If they had seen Kaa they would have killed him; and she shut her eyes as she remembered Bill with the stick upraised.

When she opened them again she was looking straight at the White Lion across the Fairground, shining and glowing in a small pool of light. She hadn't noticed it before; and she supposed that the flood-lights had only just been switched on. The hotel porch was a high one, and the lion on top of it stood out against the surrounding darkness. Leonora stared at it in wonder, as if it were a Sign in the sky. The lion was gazing thoughtfully before him; he looked grave and gentle like one of Leonora's jungle beasts.

"Meet me at the White Lion? Eleven?"

Yes, it was a Sign! Clutching Kaa tightly against her shoulder, Leonora leaped to her feet. As she ran back to her tent she heard the yowling of the Teddy-boys and guessed that they had glimpsed her in her bikini in the half-light. She dived into the narrow gap between the canvas and the tarmac, through which she had wriggled out. Kaa struggled fiercely as she carried him through.

The tent was loud with Mr. Bloxham's barking. Apparently he hadn't looked inside the tent, for he was shouting Walk up, Walk up, at the top of his voice. It generally took him a few minutes to "warm the flatties up"; they would hang about outside, staring at the painting of the naked girl in the Forest, unwilling to believe that the reality within would match the expectations which it aroused.

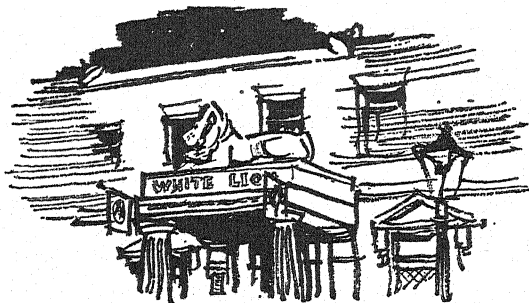
Leonora tiptoed across to her pen, and it was a matter of seconds to put on her clothes. Still nobody came in as she dragged her suit-case into the pen and pitched out its contents on to the floor. She picked up Kaa and crammed him inside, as she had done the day she took him to the vet. Then she put what clothes she could on top of him, holding

him down while he fought to get out. She closed the lid of the suit-case and secured the catch; she saw the lid heaving as Kaa struggled within.

She carried the suit-case out of her pen. It was heavy with the weight of Kaa. She glanced back and saw Joe's rabbit lying there beside Cat's body in the dim light. Shocked by the juxtaposition, Leonora made a move to pick up the rabbit; but just then Mr. Bloxham started again, Walk up an' see the lovely Jungle Girl—and figures suddenly darkened the entrance. Leonora dashed to the corner of the tent, plunged through her bolt-hole and pulled the suit-case after her.

The rain, in a cold wind, slapped her in the face. She suddenly remembered Mr. Bloxham predicting: "It'll rain before eleven." For a moment the whole of Leonora's world seemed to be filled with terror of Mr. Bloxham. She was so afraid that her legs failed her, and she crouched down beside the suit-case, watching its sides heaving in and out. Then at last she got up and picked up the suit-case and through the rain she saw the White Lion like a shining beacon high above the Fair. She dared not take her eyes off it, because of some fancy that it might suddenly disappear. *Meet me at the White Lion! Eleven!* Despite the heavy suit-case, Leonora began to run. The Fair was noisy all round her as she made for the bright and splendid Sign; and through the clamour she could still hear Mr. Bloxham shouting:

"Walk up an' see the lovely Jungle Girl! 'Oo'd be an explorer? 'Oo indeed?—all the bee-uties and the 'orrors of the savage jungle brought to your door for sixpence. . . ."



John Moore



JOHN MOORE lives with his Australian wife in a Georgian house on the slopes of Bredon Hill in Gloucestershire. He bought the house in 1949, and intends to live there for the rest of his days. Its main snag in his eyes is its large garden, as he has a passionate dislike of gardening.

He writes regularly, averaging a thousand words a day. Besides his novels and country books, for which he is best known, he has done work for films, television and broadcasting.

He has many and various interests which include fishing, keeping pigs, wild flowers, village cricket, and country fairs such as the one in *Jungle Girl*. He also has a liking for boats and ships, which springs from his wartime naval service.

John Moore's latest publication is *Man and Bird and Beast*, a collection of essays on country lore. His *September Moon*, a colourful novel set in Herefordshire at hop-picking time, appeared in an earlier Condensed Books volume.



ACT ONE:

An Autobiography

A condensation of the book by

MOSS HART

*Illustrations by Ben Stahl
Photograph by Bender, N.Y.*

*"Act One: An Autobiography"
is published by Secker & Warburg, London*

Nothing in Moss Hart's early life foreshadowed his later triumphs in the theatre. He came from a humble New York tenement, where his hard-working parents and his fiercely autocratic grandfather just couldn't understand the boy's driving urge to work in the theatre. But there was character as well as poverty in his home, intelligence and ambition in his nature, and his struggles were amply rewarded.

Today Moss Hart is one of the biggest names of the theatre; he has written a dozen successful plays, among them *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and is the much sought-after director who staged *My Fair Lady*. In *Act One*, he brings to life again the family struggles, his romantic, irresponsible Aunt Kate, the disappointments, and the excitement and backstage drama of his first play. Told with delightful warmth and humour, this autobiography will fascinate both lovers of the theatre and those for whom it is only an occasional pleasure. It is one of the most refreshing reading experiences of recent years.

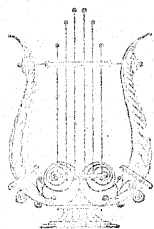
"A book of great good humour, wit and charm. . . . Mr. Hart remains a born and beautiful writer."

—John Mortimer in *The Spectator*

"A richly human story."

—Leonard Russell in *The Sunday Times*





THAT AFTERNOON, I went to work at the music shop as usual. It was just round the corner from where we lived, and I worked there every afternoon from three o'clock until seven, while its owner, a violin and piano teacher on the side, went out to give the lessons which more or less supported the shop. There was apparently no great passion for music in the Bronx at that time, and the sparseness of the customers allowed me to finish my homework rapidly and then pore greedily over as many copies of *Theatre* magazine as the library would allow me to take out.

It was, as far as I was concerned, the perfect job. There was usually even enough time, before Mr. Levenson returned, for a good half-hour or so of pure, idle dreaming: a necessity as basic to a twelve-year-old boy as food and drink. I was thoroughly conscious of the fact that my own dreams of glory were quite unlike those of the other boys in the block, for the fantasies I indulged in were always of Broadway, which to me meant the theatre. They were fantasies because, though I had lived in New York City all my life, I had never actually seen Broadway.

In my twelve-year-old world it was necessary to work after school; the four dollars I earned every week counted heavily in the shaky family budget, but the rules did not permit my going down-town alone. True, I had passed underneath Broadway many times in the subway on the way to visit relatives in Brooklyn, but the family had never yielded to my anguished entreaties that we get out at Times Square and have a quick look round. This afternoon, however, a kind fate was

arranging a most impressive look for me. When I entered the shop, Mr. Levenson was waiting for me impatiently.

"I need some music for tomorrow's lessons," he said. "All you have to do is to get off the subway at Times Square, walk two blocks east to Schirmer's, pick up the music, and then get on the subway again. Do you think your mother would let you go down-town alone, just this once?"

I nodded solemnly, not wishing to put a barefaced lie into words. I had no idea, of course, of asking for my mother's consent. This was the excuse I had been longing for. I took the slip of paper he held out to me, tossed my books and magazines on to the counter and bolted straight for the subway station.

I can still recall my excitement as I dashed up the subway stairs at Times Square and stood gaping at my first sight of Broadway and Forty-second Street. A swirling mob of happy, laughing people filled the streets. Vendors moved among them selling confetti, noise-makers and paper streamers, and policemen on horseback circled slowly and good-naturedly round the Times Building, pressing back the throngs on to the jammed pavements. My first thought was, "Of course! That's just the way I thought it would be!"

In the first breathless look it seemed completely right that Broadway should be as dazzling as this even in broad daylight, but what I took to be an everyday occurrence was Broadway waiting to celebrate the election of either Charles Evans Hughes or Woodrow Wilson as the next President of the United States. I had merely stumbled into a historic moment. It was the first of many disappointments inevitable to the stage-struck and, after trying to push through that solid mass of humanity, I got into the subway and rode glumly back to the Bronx.

I HAVE thought it fitting to begin this book with my first glimpse of Broadway, since I have spent most of my working life in and about its gaudy environs. The theatre is not so much a profession as a lifelong disease, and the most interesting aspect of that childish figure on the subway steps was not the *naïveté* about Broadway, but the already strong sense of dedication.

Why? How does it occur? What special need is masked by that simple word "stage-struck?" I have a pet theory that the theatre is a

refuge of the unhappy child. Caught in a situation he cannot resolve, any child alleviates unhappiness by contriving a world of his own, and it is but a small step from there into the fantasy world of the theatre. Here on a brightly lit stage, before a hushed and admiring audience, are people assuming heroic or villainous guises, doing the very things he has played out in his own fantasies. Suddenly he perceives that his secret goal is attainable—to be himself and yet be somebody else and, in the very act of doing so, to be loved and admired; to stand gloriously in a spotlight undimmed by the rivalry of brothers or sisters as waves of applause roll over the footlights.

I have set down the foregoing because it allows me to come somewhat circuitously to my own childhood. I grew up in an atmosphere of unrelieved poverty, with what Ruth Gordon describes as “the dark brown taste of being poor” for ever in my mouth. It was not a very happy childhood and the atmosphere was not improved by the family cast of characters. My grandfather, whom I adored, towered over my first seven years like an Everest of Victorian tyranny. He was quite an extraordinary man, and his effect on me was incalculable. He was a cigar-maker by trade, and he worked on the same bench with his closest friend, Samuel Gompers. Together they hatched out the first early dream of an American Federation of Labour, and for a while it was a toss-up as to which of them would lead the crusade. The family legend is that their friendship ended in a bitter quarrel over who was to carry the brief-case into union meetings—the one brief-case they owned between them. This sounds very much like my grandfather, and exactly the way he was likely to behave.

He most certainly behaved that way at home. His two daughters, my mother and my Aunt Kate, he looked upon as his natural servants. I think he accepted my father's dim presence in the house with passing annoyance, and he returned my adoration with a deep devotion of his own. To do him justice, he was a man of considerable personal charm, with an alert and inquiring mind, and his sorry state of shabby gentility, though due entirely to his own bad temper, was not what he had been born to. He was the black sheep of a large and quite wealthy family of English Jews, and he had at an early age alienated himself from every one of them, finally ending all family ties by settling in America.

In the best tradition of the black sheep, my grandfather had married beneath him. My grandmother could neither read nor write, and her great pleasure, in their straitened circumstances, was to have my grandfather read aloud to her in the evening. Charles Dickens was being published serially in America at that time and his works were her abiding passion. My mother has told me that the most vivid recollection of her own childhood was my grandfather's voice reading Dickens, and later on her most terrifying memory was when he would *not*—and the house would be completely silent; for when he was in a rage or fit of depression he would punish my grandmother by not reading for days and sometimes weeks at a time, and would sit evening after evening without uttering a word or allowing his wife or daughters to speak. Worse still, when the fit was over, he would never pick up where he had left off. He would start the readings again with the latest instalment, so that my grandmother was for ever in the dark about large portions of David Copperfield's life and did not know until much later what had happened to Little Em'ly.

Another tale my mother told me of this perverse and unpredictable man was his reception of the news that my grandmother had saved, after twenty years of scrounging, enough money to take them all on a trip to England. How she managed this out of her meagre allotments, how many small and large privations that money represented is painful to think of—but save it she did. And she brought it forth and offered it to her husband because he had been out of work for eight months and in such a state of melancholia that they all feared for his reason. They needn't have. When my grandmother told him that she had the money for their passage, he flew into one of his monumental rages. How dared she, he thundered, not have told him about this money before! How dared she let him walk about with the seat hanging out of his trousers and one frayed shirt to his name! It did her no good to protest that she had saved the money for just some such crisis as this.

He sulked in terrible silence for two weeks and then they sailed for London, all freshly and fashionably outfitted; for it was not my grandfather's way to let his rich family have the least hint that he had been anything but a success in his adopted country. And my mother never forgot the grand airs he gave himself or his new and unfailing courtesy to his wife and daughters.

The trip was not without its fateful consequences. My mother and father met in London—he followed her to America a year later. And on my Aunt Kate the trip produced so profound an impression that she never recovered from it. She was twenty at the time and my mother eighteen, and for both of them it was a glimpse of a kind of life they had never known or were to know again. From that moment onward, my poor Aunt Kate, an incurable romantic, behaved like a lady of fashion, disdaining work of any sort. One of the most vivid memories of my childhood is seeing her trail into her room with her bottle of smelling-salts and her inevitable novel, and hearing the lock click shut. She never so much as dried a dish while my mother cooked, cleaned and did the washing and ironing, and it drove my father crazy, as well it might. Yet it was she who opened up the world of the theatre to me and I loved her and am for ever grateful to her.

Shortly after the family returned to America, my grandmother died—heaving, I imagine, a sigh of relief that must have pushed her half-way to heaven—and my mother took over the role of housekeeper. This was a blow to my father's courtship, for it was some ten years before my grandfather allowed my mother to marry. He was not the man to let love interfere with his creature comforts. Besides, my mother acted as a daily keeper of the peace between my grandfather and my aunt, who reacted fearfully on each other's nerves. Even after my parents were finally married they were not to be alone for long.

About a month before I was born, my grandfather appeared at their door at two o'clock in the morning, and roused them out of bed. He was in a wild state and threatened that if my mother did not move back with him he would kill himself or Kate, one or the other. In some awful way I can sympathize with him—I have a rough idea of what Aunt Kate's housekeeping must have been like. But I can't think how my parents ever agreed to this foolish and tragic plan. Certainly neither they nor their marriage ever recovered from it and my mother never ceased to look wistfully back on the only time she ever spent alone with my father.

Thus it was that I was born in my grandfather's house, and I am told that I had no sooner entered into the world than I was picked up bodily by this seventy-nine-year-old autocrat and became his jealously guarded possession. How clearly he still stands out in my memory and

how much of him remains! I can see him now bending over my bed, lifting me high, then putting me on his shoulder, taking me into the dining-room and standing me in the centre of the dining-room table. And I can still dimly see the ring of upturned faces smiling at me. The faces belonged to the Friday Evening Literary Society, of which he was president. Rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I would recite the bit from *A Christmas Carol* which he had taught me, and once, I believe, at the age of five, I did him proud by belting into *Hamlet*.

Still earlier, I have a vivid memory of the terrible day he had all my hair cut off. I was not quite three at the time, and my curls, which were the fashion then for little boys, were my mother's particular pride. But since he never asked approval for anything he did, he had simply taken me to the barber and returned me to her, *fait accompli*. It was the only time, I think, my mother ever talked back to him and then only through her sobs, while my father was dispatched to the barber's-shop to try to retrieve a curl from the floor; which he did, and which my grandfather promptly flushed down the toilet. Scenes like this were the rule in my grandfather's daily life; he generated high drama as his key turned in the door, and I was usually the storm centre of both his violence and his tenderness.

Years later, another memory of him was brought sharply back to me on a very eventful night in my own life. My first real play was being given a spring try-out in Brighton Beach. I was hurrying along the promenade to the theatre, when I stopped and stared at a ramshackle public bath-house. Suddenly I remembered a sweltering August night long ago when my grandfather had led us all into this same building, then a kind of promenade night club. That whole agonizing time rushed into my mind: the terrible heat, the oppressive silence that had filled our house for so many weeks, the blind panic a child can feel when he senses a crisis in the family.

The crisis which I sensed but, at six, could not understand, was that modern industrial methods had finally caught up with the ancient craft of making cigars by hand. A machine had been invented to turn them out and my grandfather and my father, a cigar-maker also, had been out of work for months. We lived as best we could on the paltry benefits doled out by the Cigar-makers Union, and I have never forgotten, nor shall I, the plight of these two men whose trade had suddenly been



snatched from them. My grandfather was too old to try anything else, my father too frail. They tried desperately to hang on to their livelihood by buying raw tobacco, making cigars in the kitchen, and peddling them from door to door; but theirs was a pathetically lost cause.

Finally, in this terrible summer I speak of, they had stopped trying altogether and sat helplessly all day round the house, a growing fear in my grandfather's eyes that frightened me. Even I could not penetrate his cold despair, and this particular night he had shut himself in his room and had not answered my knocks and entreaties when I was sent to fetch him for the evening meal. I remember that my mother, father and aunt were sitting in heavy silence in the stifling room when

his door suddenly opened and he shouted to my mother, "Lily—how much money is there in the house?" She told him, and he called back, "Give it to me and get your hats on! We're going to Brighton Beach! I've had enough of this!" He knew, of course, that it was all the money they possessed in the world; but he had had enough of fear and despair, and off we went to the sea-shore and a floor show in the very building I was standing in front of now. I had adored him more than ever that night, and I thought, as I walked away from the place, what delight it would have given him to know that I had written a play. He was a very dramatic fellow himself.

He died a year later, when I was seven, in the same week my brother was born, and with him went almost everything that I remember with any pleasure of my childhood. It cannot be denied that he was monstrous to have round the house, but he was a figure of enormous vitality, colour and salt. Every memory I have of him is vivid and alive, from the Sunday-morning ritual of standing on a chair beside him while he dyed his hair, moustache and goatee jet black—he was as vain as he was bad-tempered—to the memory of watching him try to catch a butterfly for me with his Panama hat while a delighted crowd of Central Park strollers looked on. I think perhaps that I gave him the only peaceful, untroubled emotion he ever knew, and he gave me in return, for good or ill, a relish for people of thunder and lightning and a distaste for the humdrum. After his death I turned not to my mother or father but to my Aunt Kate, and this unconscious turning to my aunt was the most important event of my boyhood.

2

W SUPPOSE it is a trifle too easy to look down the long corridor of one's life and say, "Here is where the door opened—this was the turning point." Suppose, for instance, there had been no Aunt Kate; would the door have opened differently, the path turned the other way? Perhaps. I cannot be certain.

To the casual eye she must have seemed a foolish if not downright ridiculous woman, full of airs and graces that were faintly grotesque considering the lowly orbit in which she moved. It is both sad and strange that this often silly woman, dressed usually in idiotic attire,

was in fact an immensely intelligent, sensitive human being. Yet I must confess that in those conforming early years I was a little ashamed of her. I always looked straight ahead when we passed other children in the street.

It was a hazard I willingly undertook, for when we walked out together we were almost always on the way to the theatre. I did not know until long afterwards how she managed these excursions. The method she used was, I think, very characteristic. Quite simply, she managed them through pure blackmail. After my grandfather's death, my father, whom she detested and who detested her, continued to support her—I do not pretend to understand why. However, Aunt Kate's style was somewhat curtailed now that my father was the sole wage earner. It could not include the theatre and novels, two items she found as necessary as breathing and eating. So she sat down and wrote to the rich relatives in London, outlining her sad plight as an orphaned daughter, and shaming them into a small allowance. This she used exclusively for theatre tickets and books; come hell or high water not one penny of it was ever touched otherwise.

I can well remember some evening meals eaten by candlelight because there was no money to put in the gas meter, after which Aunt Kate would be on her way to David Belasco's production of *The Darling of the Gods* or the equivalent hit of the moment. Never once did she offer to forgo the theatre, no matter how dire the financial crisis, and, equally astonishing, she was not expected to. I think in some curious way we were grateful for this small patch of lunatic brightness in the drabness of those years. Just as she never admitted our poverty to herself, so through her passion for the theatre she made us forget it for a little while too.

My mother and I always waited up for her to return, and then she would re-create the entire evening for us. She was a wonderful reporter with a fine eye for detail and a good critical sense. She sat in the gallery, of course, but she always got to the theatre early enough to stand in the foyer and watch the audience go in—in order, as she expressed it, to get all there was to get! She must have been a strange figure, standing there, her eyes darting about, her clothes a parody of the fashionable ladies going into the theatre. But little indeed did escape her and she regaled us with all of it, from the audience arriving to the story of

the play itself. She would smooth out the programme on the kitchen table, and there we would sit, goggle-eyed, sometimes until two o'clock in the morning, reliving the play with her.

It is hard to realize in these days of television, movies and radio what all this meant to a child of those days. I remember my constant entreaty was, "When will you take me?" And then my aunt decided, with the knowledge kept from my father of course, that I was old enough to go. From the time I was seven years old I was kept away from school every Thursday afternoon and taken to the near-by Alhambra Theatre, where we watched, sober-faced, all the great vaudeville headliners. Then I graduated to Saturday matinées at the local repertory company and to touring companies at the Bronx Opera House. I lived for those wonderful Thursday and Saturday afternoons, and for those evenings when my aunt returned from the greater world of Broadway.

The effect of all this on a curious and aloof little boy is not hard to imagine. My childhood world was a bewildering battlefield of conflicting loyalties. My aunt and my father were in constant warfare, and my overworked mother seemed to live only to appease them. At school I was a lonely and alien figure. Children are quick to damn anything different from themselves; and the non-athletic boy, the youngster who liked to read or who had some interest that was strange to the rest, like the theatre, was banished from companionship. It is easy to understand how my aunt became for me a refuge against the unhappy world I lived in and how the fantasy world of the theatre became increasingly an escape and a solace—and then suddenly when I was ten years old all this crashed about my head. I can still remember the sound and even the smell of that Sunday morning.

We had taken in boarders long since to eke out my father's meagre earnings, and I might add that boarders in those days received breakfast, dinner and laundry along with the room. All of this my mother did, as well as taking care of my brother and myself, and serving separate meals to Aunt Kate in her own room. My aunt, of course, weaved through the various boarders like royalty visiting a slum, and further complicated the life of the household by locking herself in the bathroom at the busiest hours of traffic and refusing to budge.

We were all at breakfast that Sunday morning, except Aunt Kate,

when a telegram came summoning one of the boarders to St. Louis. He hurriedly packed his things, and as a parting gesture to my father, whom he liked, he left behind a number of books. My father was very pleased. He was not a great reader himself, but he had received so few gifts in his life that I think those books were some sort of symbol for him.

He went down-town to put a room-to-let advertisement in the papers, and when he returned his books were gone. Aunt Kate had blithely given them to a neighbour. At first he couldn't believe it—then he demanded that she get the books back. She merely laughed at the very suggestion. One did not ask for a gift to be returned. And then she herself produced the straw that broke the camel's back. "Just some old socialist stuff by Eugene Debs," she scoffed. "Lucky to have it out of the house."

It was unfair and unkind, and it was the last time she ever baited my father. All the accumulated years of rage and frustration in this mild little man came out in a great burst of violence. It was frightening—frightening and astonishing, both. I had hardly been aware of my father before. But Debs was his hero, and somehow his name was the touchstone that set my father off. He ordered my aunt from the house and stood over her while she packed. For once my mother's tears availed her nothing, and, while I watched horrified, my wonderful Aunt Kate dwindled before my eyes to a frightened old maid, gathering her bits of foolish finery together and dropping her beloved programmes from trembling hands all over the floor. She left the house that day and never returned, and for many years I was not allowed to see her.

That quarrel marked an end and a beginning for me. I had literally been taken over from my parents by my grandfather and my aunt. We faced a dilemma now, my parents and I. For the first time in my life I was entirely theirs—and we were strangers to each other. I realize now that it was as hard for them as it was for me, but then I was bereft and vengeful. I needed someone to blame and I blamed my father. I think I dimly knew that he was a good man, but the gulf between us was a wide one.

Later on, I also blamed my father for the fact that I was unable to graduate from public school. I went to work full time the summer I reached the eighth grade, and never returned to school—the money I

brought home was too sorely needed. I hated school, but I desperately wanted to graduate; it was a gesture that counted in our neighbourhood. My sense of shame remained fresh for a long time. I lied when anyone asked me about my schooling, and each time I lied I blamed my father anew. Somehow, I think he knew instinctively that children are not creatures of justice, and he made what efforts he could to regain his son, but the damage had been done. Only once did I ever feel close to him and then I was unable to express what I felt.

It was the Christmas after my aunt had left the house and, since it was she who always supplied the tree and the presents for my brother Bernie and myself, this first Christmas without her was a bleak one. I was more or less reconciled to it, because my father had worked only spasmodically that year and two of our rooms were vacant of boarders. Obviously Christmas was out of the question. On Christmas Eve my father was very silent during dinner. Then he startled me by turning to me and saying, "Let's take a walk." He had never suggested such a thing before. I was even more surprised when he said, "Let's go down to One Hundred and Forty-ninth Street and Westchester Avenue." My heart leaped. That was the section where at Christmas-time open push-carts full of toys stood packed end to end for blocks at a stretch. On other Christmas Eves I had often gone there with my aunt, and she had gathered from the carts what I wanted the most. I joyously concluded my father was going to buy me a present. It was to be Christmas after all!

On the walk down I was beside myself with delight and an inner relief. It had been a bad year for me, that year of my aunt's going, and I wanted a Christmas present terribly—not as a present merely. I needed some sign from my father or mother that they knew what I was going through and cared for me as much as my aunt and my grandfather had. I am sure they were giving me what mute signs they could, but I did not see them. The idea that my father had managed a Christmas present for me in spite of everything filled me with a sudden peace and lightness of heart I had not known for months.

We hurried on, our heads bent against the wind, to the cluster of lights ahead that was 149th Street and Westchester Avenue, and those lights seemed to me the brightest lights I had ever seen. Tugging at my father's coat, I started down the line of push-carts, but since nothing

had been said about buying a present, I would merely pause before a push-cart to say, with as much control as I could muster, "Look at that chemistry set!" or "There's a printing press!" Each time my father would ask the push-cart man the price. Then without a word we would move on to the next push-cart. Once or twice he would pick up a toy and look at it and then at me, as if to suggest I might like it, but I was ten years old and my heart was set on a chemistry set or a printing press. Alas, the prices were always the same and soon I saw that only two or three push-carts remained. My father saw this too, and I heard him jingle some coins in his pocket. In a flash I knew it all. He'd got together about seventy-five cents to buy me a Christmas present, and he hadn't dared say so in case there was nothing to be had for so small a sum.

As I looked up at him I saw a look of despair and disappointment in his eyes that brought me closer to him than I had ever been in my life. I wanted to throw my arms round him and say, "It doesn't matter . . . I understand . . . this is better than a chemistry set or a printing press . . . I love you." But instead we stood shivering beside each other for a moment—then turned and started silently back home. I didn't even take his hand on the way home nor did he take mine. Nor did I ever tell him how close to him I felt that night—that for a little while the concrete wall between father and son had crumbled away and I knew that we were two lonely people struggling to reach each other.

I came close to telling him many years later. Again it was Christmas but now my father was a bright and blooming ninety-one years of age, and I arrived in Florida with my wife to spend the holidays with him. On Christmas Eve I sat on a sofa with my father, showing him pictures of his two grandchildren. Suddenly I felt his hand slip into mine. No words were spoken and I went right on turning the pages of the picture album, but my hand remained over his. I did not tell him what I was thinking and feeling. The moment was enough. It had taken forty years for the gulf that separated us to close.

THIS WAS the world, then, that I lived in. There were two motivating influences in it—two compelling forces which served as sharply as the people round me to mould the years that followed. The first was a goad. The second, a goal.

The goad was poverty. Now there is nothing disgraceful about poverty, and I have noticed that children of poor families do not seem humiliated or hampered by it. Indeed, in many ways they lead a freer and less thwarted life than the constantly supervised children of the well-to-do. So I have never been able to explain satisfactorily to myself just why I hated poverty so passionately. I can only remember that even my early childhood was filled with a series of bitter resolves to get myself out of it.

My goal, of course, was the theatre. I had no idea how I was to achieve it, but I knew there was no other world possible for me. I wanted naturally, to be an actor. Not even in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would one day write the words for actors to speak on the stage.

Had I had the wit to perceive it, there was already a hint, by the time I was thirteen, that I was a dramatist; even then I could dramatize a story and hold an audience, and I used this gift the way other boys use a good pitching arm or a long reach in basket-ball. It gave me the only standing I was ever to have in the tough and ruthless world of boys of my own age.

A city child's summer is spent in the street in front of his home, and all through the long summer holidays I sat on the kerb and watched the other boys in the block play baseball or prisoner's base or gutter hockey. I was never asked to take part—not out of cruelty, but because they took it for granted I would be no good at it. They were right. Yet much of the envy and loneliness I suffered in those years could have been borne better if a single wise teacher or a knowledgeable parent had made me understand that there were compensations for the untough and the non-athletic; that the world would not always be bounded by the kerbstone in front of the house.

When I blundered into one of these compensations, its effect was electric on both me and the other boys in the block. I have never forgotten the joy of that wonderful evening when it happened. The baseball and other games ended when it grew dark. Then it was the custom of the boys to retire to a little stoop that jutted out from the candy shop at the corner and sit there talking aimlessly. Ultimately, long silences would fall and the boys would wander off one by one. It was just after one of those long pauses that one boy broke the silence with an idle



question: "What's in those books you're always reading?" "Stories," I answered. "What kind?" asked somebody else without much interest.

I do not know what impelled me to behave as I did, for usually I just sat there in silence, glad to be allowed to remain among them; but instead of answering his question, I launched full tilt into the book I was immersed in at the moment. It was Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and I told them the story for two full hours. They listened wide-eyed and breathless. Listening to a tale in the dark is one of the most ancient of man's entertainments, but I was offering them as well, without being aware of it, a new and exciting experience. The books they read were *The Rover Boys* or *Tom Swift* or G. A. Henty. I had read them too, but, since there was no one to say me nay, I had gone right from *Tom Swift* to *Sister Carrie*. Blunderingly, I was giving them a glimpse of the riches outside the world of *Tom Swift*. Not one of them left the stoop until I had finished, and I went upstairs that wonderful evening not only a member of the tribe but a figure in my own right.

The next night, and many nights thereafter, a kind of ritual took place. As it grew dark, I would take my place in the centre of the stoop and, like Scheherazade, begin the evening's tale. Some nights I cheated. I would stop at the most exciting part of a story by Jack London or Bret Harte, and tell them, untruthfully, that this was as far as I had gone in the book; it would have to be continued the following evening. I had to make certain of my new-found power and position, and I spun out the long summer evenings until school began again in the autumn. Other words of mine have been listened to by larger, more fashionable audiences, but for that tough and grimy one that huddled on the stoop outside the candy shop I have an unreasoning affection that will last for ever. It was a glorious summer, and it was the last I was to spend with the boys in the block.

The following summer, since I was thirteen, I would be able to obtain "working papers" and get a job down-town. All that winter I concocted grandiose dreams of getting a job as office boy for Florenz Ziegfeld or Sam Harris, and somehow working my way down from the office and through the stage door. As the last days of school loomed ahead, I scanned the Sunday advertisements more and more desperately, searching for one that would read, "Office boy wanted in theatrical office." There were none, of course. Nepotism runs through the theatre with the grandeur of the Mississippi at flood time, and when a boy is needed there is always a nephew on hand. But this I did not know then. I persisted in believing the advertisement I dreamed of would certainly appear the following Sunday.

By the time I was ready to concede defeat, all the best jobs were gone and I took the only one I could get: it was in the storage vault of a wholesale furrier, and my job was to open the heavy steel door of this vault as the hampers of wet skins were brought in and then hang the furs on racks to dry. It was tedious work, but it was cool inside the vault and I had ample time to read.

The job had another compensation, and I took full advantage of it once I stoically accepted the fact that after I had been eight hours in a vault with uncured skins people were likely to walk rapidly away from me. As the weather grew hotter, avenues of space would open up round me in the crush of the Bronx Express. I pretended not to hear the muttered imprecations of my fellow riders and would gaze innocently

around me for a moment as though trying to discover who it was that smelt so bad. Then, with enough elbow space to read, I would bury my face in my paper.

For a new excitement had come into my reading life—the New York *Evening World*, which through F.P.A. and his column, “The Conning Tower,” illuminated for me not only the world of the theatre but the world of wit and laughter as well. Every Saturday his “Diary of ‘Our Own Samuel Pepys’” appeared, and I would breathlessly go through the week with him on a round of opening nights and opening-night parties. The Diary was spattered with the names of the famous—and the lucky. I venture to guess that in the grand design of any successful career the element of luck has been a powerful factor. Perhaps luck is too inclusive a word. There is also a sense of timing—or perhaps a quirk of character—that enables its fortunate possessor to tread the main path and never swerve from it. Every successful person I have ever known has had it—actor or businessman, writer or politician. It is an instinct or ability to seize the right moment without wavering or playing safe, and without it many gifted people flicker brilliantly and briefly and then fade into oblivion.

It would have been hard to convince me then that I was one of the lucky ones, however; for week after week, lengthening into years, the door of the vault closed behind me.

And then it happened. One morning when I was almost seventeen I decided that when I went out for lunch the steel door of that vault was going to swing behind me for the last time. I would not stack those skins for another day.

At twelve o'clock I took down my lunch box, gave a last look round and walked out. I didn't give notice or say good-bye. I knew that I could not afford to be out of work for so much as a week with the present state of things at home, but, like Scarlett O'Hara, I resolved to think of all that tomorrow. Right now, I turned my face towards Times Square and started walking. This afternoon at least, I'd have an authentic smell of Broadway.

I decided to pay a visit to my one and only link with the theatre. My friend George Steinberg, who lived in the apartment next to ours, had the very job I coveted. His Aunt Belle worked in a theatrical office and he was office boy. I cultivated his friendship shamelessly, though

it seemed to me an unjust caprice of fate that George, who cared nothing about the theatre and hated his job should work in a theatrical office.

As I finally stood looking up at the façade of the New Amsterdam Theatre I sighed. Imagine going to work every day through the foyer of a theatre where the *Ziegfeld Follies* was playing! I stood in the foyer and looked at the pictures for a moment. There they all were—Marilyn Miller, Will Rogers, Fanny Brice, W. C. Fields. I took the lift to the eighth floor and found the office where George worked. The door was marked AUGUSTUS PITOU, THEATRICAL ENTERPRISES. I opened it hesitantly and walked in. I recognized Aunt Belle immediately in the tiny outer office, typing fiercely, her head bent over the machine. Without looking up, she barked out, "No casting today. Come back in two weeks." She finished the letter, ripped it out of the roller, and as she inserted the envelope spoke again, still without looking up. "Didn't you hear me? No casting today."

"May I speak to George, please?" I said.

"George isn't here," she answered, her fingers never stopping. "He quit today."

"He quit? You mean he gave up the job?" My voice was so incredulous that Aunt Belle looked up for the first time.

"Who are you? A friend of George's?"

I nodded. "We live next door to each other."

"Well, he quit," said Aunt Belle. "Try and do good for your relatives!" Her head bent over the machine again.

I took a deep breath and plunged. "Miss Belle," I said, "could I have the job? I just quit my old job today, too."

The typewriter stopped and she looked at me again. "Sure, why not? Save writing an advertisement, and I got no more nephews, thank God. Go in and see Mr. Pitou and ask him if it's all right."

I stood there immobilized. "Go ahead," she said irritably. "You want the job or don't you?"

Did I want the job! I walked past her and knocked on Mr. Pitou's door and a voice said, "Come in." Mr. Pitou's head was bent over a long booking-route sheet and, like Aunt Belle, he did not look up. After a long moment, he said "What is it?"

"Miss Belle sent me in to see you, Mr. Pitou," I replied. "Is it all

right for me to be the new office boy?" Mr. Pitou seemed not to hear; then he sniffed, and for a terrible moment I thought a waft of my unmistakable aroma had reached him. I moved away to the open window. He sneezed—and my heart stopped pounding. It started to pound again when he spoke.

"Fifteen dollars a week," he said. "Could you start tomorrow?"

"I could start now, sir." I had difficulty not shouting it.

"That's good," he said. "What's your name?"

"Moss Hart," I replied.

"Mouse?" he said. "Take this booking sheet down to George Tyler. He's on the fourth floor. And take this note up to Goldie, Mr. Ziegfeld's secretary—that's on the floor above this." He handed me the booking sheet and the letter, already lost in what I came to know as his daily bible, the *Railway Guide*.

I closed the door behind me. "I got it, Miss Belle! I got it!"

She looked up, a little startled.

"Well, that's good," she said. "You can run out first and get me a container of coffee and some aspirin. My head is splitting."

I did not realize until much later how fitting it was that I should make my entry into the theatre with a container of black coffee in one hand and an aspirin in the other.

3

As it turned out, I couldn't have contrived a better beginning in the theatre. True, Mr. Pitou was not exactly a "Broadway" producer. Like his father before him, he was known as the "King of the One Night Stands." Pitou, Sr., had left to his son a stable of stars, a map of the United States, the *Railway Guide* and the route sheets. The stars were Chauncey Olcott, Fiske O'Hara, May Robson, Elsa Ryan, Joseph Regan and Gerald Griffin; and each year, from Labour Day to 30th June, six companies with six different stars spread out over the land, bearing the imprint AUGUSTUS PITOU, JR., PRESENTS . . . Occasionally in cities like San Francisco and Seattle, they settled in for the luxury of a three-day or a week's stand; but other than that it was: "Tonight, Huron, Michigan . . . tomorrow night, Green Bay, Wisconsin."

In spite of his wizardry with the *Railway Guide*, Mr. Pitou sometimes cut things awfully close. There would be a week now and then when the poor creatures would never get near a bed, but would sleep sitting up in the train and exist on bars of chocolate and apples. Yet I can never recall an instance of May Robson or Fiske O'Hara missing a performance, though Miss Robson was nearing sixty and O'Hara sang ten or twelve songs a night. Sick, exhausted or hungry, they went on every night.

More astonishing still was the fact that each star had a new vehicle each season, and that one playwright wrote all the plays. Her name was Anne Nichols. It was a sad day, indeed, for Mr. Pitou when *Abie's Irish Rose*, which she produced herself, miraculously turned into a Broadway success. It helped to ruin him; and the triumph of that incredible play was to change my own fate considerably too.

At this happy moment, however, Augustus Pitou was safely enthroned as King of the One Night Stands, and, though I was still a far cry from being entangled with "Broadway," there was certainly not a happier office boy than I was. I got to the office a full hour before nine o'clock—simply because I delighted in just being there; and though Mr. Pitou left to take the five-thirty train to Bayside, Long Island, I seldom left before seven. Though I never learned in three and a half years how to stack skins correctly, I was able with ridiculous ease to use the complicated *Railway Guide* and lay out a booking route like a professional.

There was one thing, however, that I could not seem to learn. I could not for the life of me say the routine "No casting today, come back in two weeks" to those wonderful beings, the actors who poured into the office; and this almost cost me my job. Within a few days the news was about that Mr. Pitou would see anyone, and the office was jammed. Mr. Pitou fought his way in in the morning, and, worse still, had to fight his way out when he went down the corridor to the wash-room. I was sternly ordered to keep the outside office cleared, but in spite of myself the words "No casting today, come back in two weeks" somehow always seemed to emerge as an invitation to sit down and talk about the theatre. Finally one morning Miss Belle announced tartly, "Mr. Pitou says that if the office is not empty when he goes to the wash-room today we get a new office boy." And thus ended for

ever, I should imagine, the last dim spark of gallantry among theatrical office boys. Even today, when casting a large production, I find it fairly agonizing to walk into a theatre or office jammed with eager actors and know that no more than two or three of them will even get a chance to read for a part.

For the moment, nevertheless, I learned to say "no" briskly and I quickly became indispensable to Mr. Pitou. I am ashamed to relate that within six months time I displaced the formidable Miss Belle and became his secretary myself. This was not quite as ruthless as it may appear to be, since Miss Belle worked for two other entrepreneurs as well as for Mr. Pitou.

By this time a whole new life had opened for me. I had early on joined the confederation of office boys who worked in Forty-second Street, a sharp and knowing crew, the main by-product of whose jobs was the free tickets they dispensed to their bosses' shows. I could offer them no free tickets on my own, but I managed little favours, and for two years I went to the theatre every evening, with the exception of Saturday nights, when the free list was suspended even for the flops.

Again, I could not have arranged a better time to have a gate swing open. It was the heyday of a flourishing New York theatre—the early 1920's. Seventy theatres were going full blast during the height of the season. I saw everything—hits and failures. Just walking into a theatre and waiting for the curtain to go up was all I asked, but I was grateful to the free tickets for a more personal reason. They brought Aunt Kate back into my life. I knew that she had never sat anywhere but in the gallery, and I was determined to find her and escort her grandly into the orchestra stalls. Seven years had passed since that terrible Sunday when she left our house. Her name was not allowed to be mentioned. I suspected that my mother received an occasional furtive letter from her; but she never spoke of it and I did not dare ask.

One Saturday evening I paid a visit to some cousins in Brooklyn and made discreet inquiries. Aunt Kate, of all things, was working only a few blocks away from the New Amsterdam Theatre. She had ultimately worn out her welcome with all the relatives, and for the last two years she had been custodian of linens in the Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls.

The next afternoon after lunch I telephoned her from a drugstore.

While I waited for her to be called to the telephone, my mind raced ahead to the wonderful evenings we would have together and back to the remembrance of those old evenings in the kitchen, and of how much she and they had meant to me. Then a voice said, "Hello." It was unmistakably Aunt Kate. She managed still to put into the simple word "Hello" all the archaic grandeur, all the hauteur of a lady of fashion. Of sheets and pillowcases, and the fact that she had been forced to go to work for the first time in her life at the age of sixty, there was no hint. I could have hugged her!

When I said, "This is Moss, Aunt Kate," there was a glacial silence, and when she spoke again her voice was distant and cold. She had been very hurt, there was no doubt of that, by my failure to get in touch with her in spite of my father. But my eagerness to see her and to take her to the theatre was so patent that in a few moments she relented and we were interrupting each other quite like old times, until my money ran out.

What a joy it was to hear those grandiloquent and noble phrases roll forth once again! And how satisfactory her reception was of the news that I was an office boy in a theatrical office—she received it as though I had announced my appointment as Ambassador to the Court of St. James's! With a sudden pang I realized all at once how deeply I had missed her. I wanted to meet her that very afternoon, but this was one of her "working Sundays in," she grandly explained, so we agreed to meet on the following Tuesday evening. I had some lunch money saved up and I pleaded to take her to dinner before the theatre, but she insisted I come to dinner with her at the Clara De Hirsch Home.

This turned out to be one of the most misbegotten ideas ever spawned by Aunt Kate. On Tuesday morning Mr. Pitou announced to my chagrin that he was staying in town to take Mrs. Pitou to the theatre and would I mind working a little later. Why I did not telephone my aunt that I would be delayed I have no idea, but I did not do so. I was well over half an hour late as I hurried towards the Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls at the corner of Third Avenue, and a figure on the steps was staring anxiously towards me.

It was a thin and emaciated woman who stood there, a woman who bore no resemblance to the bosomy and buxom Aunt Kate that I remembered. But in a moment I saw that it was indeed she, and as I

leaned over to kiss her some of the strain left her face and it seemed less gaunt and pinched.

I came to know later on that I had constituted her sole topic of conversation with the staff and the girls from the moment she had set foot in the place. No doubt her inventions about me were as romantic and fashionable as the stories that she made up about herself, but it was a touching proof of how much she loved me. And when it seemed she could at last produce me for all to see, her excitement had been immense. When I was late, she must have stood there in an agony of waiting for fear I had forgotten.

As we walked in, I stole a sideways glance at her. The clothes were the same, pathetically grand and foolish, but they hung loosely on her. I made myself look straight at the ravaged face. Surely these few years of work could not have wreaked such havoc. Suddenly it struck me, with terrible certainty, that she was dying.

Inside, the din was incredible. Opening off the main hall was the dining-room, filled to overflowing with about three hundred girls; and as Aunt Kate appeared with me beside her in the doorway, a silence fell as loud as the din that had preceded it.

As we walked to a table at the far end of the room, six hundred eyes followed us in silence, and then a cacophony of smothered giggles began to flow over me like molten lava. By the time we reached the staff table I was in an anguish of embarrassment and rage. I forgot how ill she looked and how much I loved her. I could only wipe the perspiration from my face, and sit there staring at my plate. When the ladies of the staff plied me with well-intentioned questions, I simply nodded or grunted disagreeably. I could feel my aunt's dismay, and I tried to recover but I could not, for every so often a girl stifling a giggle would come over to the table and ask to be introduced, and my aunt would ring out my name like some terrible Master of Ceremonies.

Somehow the meal ground to a finish, and all I could think of was the gauntlet to be run when we left the dining-room—not a girl appeared to have gone from any table. They seemed, in fact, to be waiting for our exit.

Aunt Kate, once again the grand lady of fashion, proclaimed in a ringing voice, "We shall be late for the theatre," and rose from her chair. Immediately silence fell over the room, and as we had entered,

so we left; only this time the laughter and giggles were less well concealed. I could have wrung each neck singly and with pleasure, though my aunt seemed to notice nothing.

She was furious with me, I knew, and in a dismal silence we walked towards the theatre. Had I been a few years younger I would have been tempted to burst into tears. How eagerly I had looked forward to this and how thoroughly she had ruined it by the folly of meeting in that dining-room! Why need she always be so different from anybody else? The laughter of those wretched girls rang in my ears, melting into the laughter of the kids in the block as they used to laugh when my aunt walked by, and I cringed. How could I have known that it was her uniqueness that gave me so much that I treasured?

It was not until we reached the theatre that either of us spoke. As we walked into the foyer, Aunt Kate instinctively turned towards the steps leading up to the gallery. Without a word I took her arm and steered her towards the orchestra stalls door, and as I handed our stubs to the usher I said, "From now on we sit in the orchestra stalls." For the first time that evening she smiled; and the sight of Aunt Kate sweeping through the orchestra stalls door, just as I had imagined she would, was magical. In a moment everything was forgotten and forgiven by both of us. Aunt Kate sailed down the aisle like a ship coming into port and sank into her seat, with a quiet sigh of being home at long last.

From that memorable evening on, we were inseparable. I said nothing at home about our meeting, of course, but almost every evening Aunt Kate and I trotted off happily together to dinner and the theatre. I never went near the Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls again. Instead we went to a restaurant called Lorber's, directly opposite the Metropolitan Opera House.

Lorber's was a left-over relic of the nineties, and it suited Aunt Kate exactly. The walls were satin-covered, and little pink lamps stood on each table; an astonishingly good dinner could be had for seventy-five cents. Somehow at Lorber's Aunt Kate did not seem out of place. No heads turned to look at her strange garb and the old waiters never raised an eyebrow at the stentorian voice with which she ordered the meal. The sense of belonging at last, of being in a proper setting, seemed to soothe her troubled spirit and at Lorber's she talked sensibly and

shrewdly. She even discussed my father and herself with acute understanding, and once she took my hand in a rare moment of tenderness and said, "Some day I hope you'll be as good a son to your mother as you've been to me." I have never forgotten the way she said it.

She died at the end of that year. I have always been grateful that it was, I think, the happiest one of her life. Of all the good things the theatre has given me, I count as not the least those free tickets that enabled me to give Aunt Kate that last wonderful year.

I SUPPOSE everyone has at some time speculated on the curious chain of events set in motion by a single innocent act. How strange a quirk of fate it is that as Mr. Pitou's dependable author, Anne Nichols, was writing *Abie's Irish Rose* she was also changing for ever the life of an obscure office boy named Moss Hart.

Miss Nichols's play, which had opened to almost unanimous critical disdain, was showing enough signs of staggering through the season to alert Mr. Pitou to a very real predicament. He was certain, as was everyone else, that *Abie's Irish Rose* was doomed to failure, but so long as Anne Nichols persisted in believing that it was going to turn into a success, she would not give any thought to those new plays that were so necessary a part of Mr. Pitou's business. And *Abie's Irish Rose* refused to die, with a miraculous stubbornness that was to turn Anne Nichols into a millionairess.

There was one historic moment when Miss Nichols, in desperate need of money to keep the play going, offered Mr. Pitou a half interest in *Abie's Irish Rose* for five thousand dollars, and he agreed to go to the Saturday matinée, look at the play again, and then make his decision. This mighty decision was not made by him, however, but by Mrs. Pitou, and I was an accidental witness to it.

On that crucial Saturday Mr. Pitou instructed me to meet him after the second act of *Abie's Irish Rose* and bring with me the usual telegrams reporting matinée receipts for our shows on the road. At four thirty, I was waiting in the foyer as Mr. and Mrs. Pitou emerged. I stood there as Mr. Pitou read through the telegrams, and when he had finished Mrs. Pitou suddenly spoke up sharply. She said, "Gus, if you put five thousand dollars into this terrible play, don't you ever dare say no to me when I want a new dress or a new fur coat for the rest of my



life." I like to think of that heartfelt sentence as one of the most expensive remarks in theatrical history, for Mr. Pitou did not buy that half interest in *Abie's Irish Rose* for five thousand dollars, and Anne Nichols enjoyed her millions alone. She deserved them, for she sold her house, pawned her jewels and steadfastly refused to write anything until her faith in that bit of dramatic nonsense was justified.

Mr. Pitou finally faced up to the inevitable. New writers were engaged to grind out the next season's output, and the plays were launched on Labour Day as usual. They ranged from indifferent to passable except for one play which starred Joseph Regan. That play was, in a word, unforgivable. People stayed away from it in successively greater numbers and by the time it was winding its noisome way through Illinois Mr. Pitou was so desperate he asked me to take plays home to read, in the hope of finishing out the season with a new script. It was on a Sunday, after reading batches of footling and foolish manuscripts, that the terrible idea occurred to me that was to prove my undoing. Bored to distraction by the trash I was thumbing through, I put a piece of paper in my battered typewriter and wrote: "Act One. Scene One."

By twelve o'clock that night Act One was completed and the next morning I took it into the office with me. I did not put my own name on the title page, but instead strung together the first three names of some of the boys in the block—"Robert Arnold Conrad." Candour compels me to reveal that the title was *The Beloved Bandit*, but I do not believe candour demands that I reveal any more of the play than that.

The next morning I handed the act to Mr. Pitou. "I read an act of a play last night that I think is very good," I said casually.

"Who wrote it?" asked Mr. Pitou.

"A friend of mine named Robert Arnold Conrad," I replied.

"I'll read it this evening," he said. And that was that.

I'm certain to this day that I meant it to be no more than a mild joke. I was utterly unprepared when the following morning Mr. Pitou entered the office, slapped the act down on the desk triumphantly and said, "We found it! If the rest holds up anything like as well, we're home. When can I get the second act?"

"Tomorrow," I replied, too stunned to know what I was saying.

"Great," said Mr. Pitou. "Take a letter to Mr. Conrad—I want to point out a few things he ought to do in the second act."

Why I did not tell Mr. Pitou the truth then and there escapes me even now. By the time I had typed the letter and he had signed it, I was doomed to go on.

That night I wrote Act Two. It took me until almost five o'clock in the morning. Bleary-eyed, I handed it to Mr. Pitou the next day. He read it at once. This time his enthusiasm was even greater. "Mouse," he said, "phone your friend to come in tomorrow—I'd like to speak to him myself."

Panic-stricken, I blurted out, "Oh, he's very seldom in his office, Mr. Pitou. He's in court most of the day. He's a lawyer." An unholy gift of invention seems to spring to the aid of all liars at moments like these.

"Well, when do you think he'll have the third act finished?"

"I guess you could have it tomorrow," I replied haltingly.

"Fine, fine," said Mr. Pitou. "He writes fast, just what we need right now. Better take a letter and give it to him tonight."

And there poured forth under my panic-frozen fingers another four-page single-spaced letter from Mr. Pitou. Glassy-eyed, I watched him sign it, and in a moment of sweet clarity the thought flashed through my mind: "You've got to tell him now."

But Mr. Pitou spoke instead. "You know, Mouse," he said, with a satisfied smile, "I don't often go round giving myself pats on the back, but I think my letter helped Mr. Conrad. I'd like to take a copy of this one home and show it to Mrs. Pitou. I've been telling the family about this young fellow."

That did it. To confess to Mr. Pitou that he had been writing these wonderful letters to his office boy was bad enough; but to make him out an utter fool in the eyes of his family was something I could not face. That night I tackled the third act. Alas, third acts are notoriously tough, and Robert Arnold Conrad, a sorry spectacle by this time, did not finish the act that night. The next day I fended Mr. Pitou off as best I could. I was almost too tired to care. I wanted only to finish the third act, tell him the truth, and get it over with. All I cared about was not losing my job as a consequence of this miserable joke.

That night I went to sleep after dinner and slept until midnight.

Then I sat down at the typewriter and did not get up until I had typed "The curtain falls." It was eight o'clock in the morning. Now that it was done, I could hardly wait to get down to the office and confess to Mr. Pitou. When I walked in at nine o'clock he was already there, looking immensely pleased with himself. He spoke while I was still in the doorway: "Got that third act?"

I handed it to him. "Mr. Pitou," I began—but I got no further.

"Get your friend up here right away," he interrupted. "The damndest thing has happened. I showed these two acts to Mrs. Henry B. Harris last night, and she says this play is too good for the road—she wants to co-produce it with me on Broadway. I'll bring the company back from Omaha, rehearse the play here, open in Rochester, play Chicago for four weeks, and then we'll bring it in. It will be my first New York production."

I stared numbly as Mr. Pitou left to go downstairs to the booking office to book a date for the opening of the play. When he returned he asked, "What time is Mr. Conrad coming in?"

"Two o'clock," I replied, promptly and automatically, as though somebody else were using my voice.

"Fine," said Mr. Pitou. "I'll read the third act before then."

The enormity of what I had done settled over me like a paralysing suit of mail. I had made Mr. Pitou a figure of ridicule even outside his own family. I had no doubt that he had told Mrs. Harris the whole story of his letters to Robert Arnold Conrad.

He went out for lunch, taking the third act with him. When he returned a little before two o'clock, he said, "It's just right. He certainly read my letters carefully." He looked at his watch. "I'm kind of anxious to meet him now," he said, as he picked up the *Railway Guide* and settled back to wait.

I watched the moments drag by. Finally he put the *Railway Guide* down and looked at his watch unbelievably. "Why, it's three o'clock," he said. "Where is he?"

I had to tell the last lie to fend off approaching doom a little longer. "He must have been held up in court, Mr. Pitou."

For the first time Mr. Pitou looked hard at me. He rose from the desk. "Get your coat, Mouse," he said. "We'll go down to his office and wait for him. I've got to have those contracts signed."

Somehow I put on my hat and coat and followed him to the lift. The terrible moment had come at last; I was trapped and I knew it. I made my revelation between the eighth and fifth floors as the lift shot downward, and I remember every word. "Mr. Pitou," I said, "I have a confession to make."

Mr. Pitou turned and looked at me a little wonderingly, as well he might have, for my voice had gone at least two octaves higher. I swallowed and got the rest of it out.

"Mr. Pitou, I am Robert Arnold Conrad."

The lift doors opened and we both stepped out. In silence we walked the length of the lobby and out into Forty-second Street. Only then did Mr. Pitou give any indication that he had heard me. "Mouse," he said, "I don't know whether you know it, but when an author writes his first play he doesn't get the regular royalties."

I could hardly believe my ears. "You mean—it's all right, Mr. Pitou?" I faltered.

"Certainly it's all right," he replied, "as long as you understand that a new author doesn't get the regular royalties. I'd better go over and see Mrs. Harris and tell her the good news." He patted me on the shoulder, smiled down at me and started off.

I stood stock still for a moment, and my first emotion, if such it may be called, was one of hunger. I could not remember having eaten at all for the last three days. I walked to the orange-juice stand at the corner and ate one frankfurter after another, until the counterman said, "You'll be sick, buddy—better knock off."

He was right. I just managed to get back to the office and into the wash-room in time. It was a portent for the future: I have been sick in the men's room every opening night of a play of mine in theatres all over the country.

4

THE NEXT DAY I was presented to Mrs. Harris, and my dual career as office boy and built-in playwright swung into full gear. Neither Mr. Pitou nor I seemed to feel that any great change in my status had taken place, which was exactly what I had prayed for. By the same token, the news that I had written a play was received with

hardly a lift of an eyebrow at home. I think that my mother and father thought it was some sort of office homework I had done in the evenings. Only Mrs. Harris seemed to gather a secret amusement from the situation. She treated me with a grave outward courtesy that was belied only by the twinkle in her eye. Mrs. Harris was rich, racy and of infinite good humour. She owned the Hudson Theatre in Forty-fourth Street, a yacht and a stable of horses. Her inordinate liking for *The Beloved Bandit* was something I have never fathomed, for she was theatrically shrewd.

Priestly Morrison, an actor of great charm and quite a good director, was engaged to stage the play, and I suspected almost at once that he thought *The Beloved Bandit* was absolute nonsense; but he was scrupulously polite, if non-committal. In ten days from the fateful morning I had handed Mr. Pitou the third act, the company was in rehearsal. Joseph Regan remained the star; but an entirely new cast was engaged.

I was allowed the morning off to attend the first reading, but thereafter I remained in the office until four o'clock in the afternoon, when both Mr. Pitou and I would ceremoniously attend rehearsals. It must have been somewhat bewildering to the cast to see the author of the play sent out to get a packet of cigarettes or a container of coffee for the producer; but whatever they thought they kept it to themselves and were always unfailingly kind to me. Only the stage manager, a hardened soul, took an exceedingly dim view of the entire proceedings. He would emit long, doleful sighs from time to time, like a sheep dog settling down in front of the fire-place, and when questioned about his gloom he would simply raise his eyes heavenward and tap the manuscript of the play with a finger of doom.

In spite of him, rehearsals were indomitably cheerful. Mrs. Harris did not appear until the first run-through, and then, under the spell of her delighted laughter, the actors outdid themselves and the play seemed to spring to life. Three days later we all left for the opening performance in Rochester, New York, filled with hope and dreams of glory.

THERE ARE many "firsts" in one's life when one is young; but there are certain "firsts" that remain for ever memorable. I had never been outside New York City. I had never ridden in a Pullman train

or eaten in a dining-car, and I had never stayed in a hotel. All these things now took place in glittering succession. I sat on the bed in my hotel room in Rochester, drinking in a joyous sense of privacy. I would sleep alone in a room that night for the first time in my life. I did not know until that moment what a precious refreshment to the spirit privacy is; it was a long time before I could rouse myself to go to the theatre for the dress rehearsal.

The play was in one set, with simple props—a prime requisite of any Pitou production; so it was taken for granted that the dress rehearsal would be a smooth one. I have learned since that the gods who hover over dress rehearsals are wildly unpredictable.

That night was chaos. The curtain jammed going up and the set, of a hideous green colour, buckled during the first five minutes and nearly brained the character man. There was an unholy wait until it was made fast, and the entrance of the star, trilling a lilting Irish ballad, was somewhat marred as he tripped over a stage brace and sprawled full length, all six Irish feet of him, smack into the fire-place. As he picked himself up, cursing, the rain which had been falling in torrents all day turned into hail, and for the next half-hour not a word was to be heard—a small mercy for which I was not then sufficiently grateful.

Nothing worked. If an actor went to open a door, it stuck. And when the leading lady, with a loud cry of passion, rushed to the window to open it and call after the star, it came off the frame and she was left standing with the entire window in her hands. By the second act, the actors were dithering about the stage, hopelessly waiting for the next calamity to descend, and sure enough, Joseph Regan, making his second-act entrance through the same door, tripped again over the same stage brace—only this time the fire-place crumpled under the impact and fell in a shambles all round him. Even Priestly Morrison's unfailing good spirits and courtly manners deserted him at this point and he stalked up the aisle muttering imprecations.

Only Mrs. Harris remained unperturbed. She sat unwavering through each successive disaster; leaning over to Mr. Pitou from time to time, she would say quietly, "A bad dress rehearsal means a good opening night, Gus. I've never seen it fail."

Somehow the third act dragged through with only the minor casualty of the juvenile being hit in the eye by a flying piece of a teacup that

shattered as he banged it down on the table. When the bleeding subsided, the play proceeded uneventfully until the damaged fire-place fell again with a tremendous crash just as the curtain came down. This roused Priestly Morrison from the depths of his seat, where he had sunk so low that only the top of his hat was visible. He uncurled himself slowly and came up the aisle to Mr. Pitou and Mrs. Harris. He raised his hat to them both and said, "I'm not going to give any notes to the actors tonight. I'm going to church early tomorrow morning and offer up a little prayer. I suggest everyone do the same." He bowed slightly and disappeared up the dark aisle.

We walked back to the hotel through the sleeping city, too tired even for a cup of coffee. When I reached my room the privacy I so longed for seemed a dubious gift; I paced up and down and thought of the dread consequences for me if the play were to fail. I did not give a hoot about the play—my name was not even listed as author. What I cared about was losing my job, and I knew Mr. Pitou well enough to know that he would ultimately place the blame, not on his misjudgment or Mrs. Harris's, but on the trick I had played on him. I castigated myself for my own folly, until I fell asleep with my clothes on and dreamed a sweet dream that the play was a glorious success.

Next morning was bitterly cold, but at least the sun was shining, and I was already beginning to look with superstitious awe on such small omens for an opening night. There was an eleven-o'clock rehearsal at the theatre, and this time the proceedings on the stage resembled something akin to sanity. A curious hypnotic state now fell upon everyone connected with *The Beloved Bandit*. The mere fact that the play proceeded from one act to another without disaster seemed to dissipate any kind of valid judgment, and by the time the rehearsal was over witless optimism was flowing through the theatre like May wine.

We were all in ebullient good spirits as we started for the theatre that evening. The audience looked delightful to me as I stood in the foyer watching them file in, and for a brief moment I had a fantasy of rising from my seat as the final curtain fell and making a graceful little speech, climaxing it with that deathless sentence, "Ladies and gentlemen—I am Robert Arnold Conrad."

I took my seat just as the curtain rose. The audience seemed slightly

stunned as the ghastly set stood revealed but there was only the slightest murmur and they settled back generously to enjoy themselves. In the first fifteen minutes of a play an audience is the most receptive group in the world. But if by the end of that first fifteen minutes the play has not captured them, they can never be welded together again.

The first fifteen minutes of *The Beloved Bandit* went by in devastating silence. The American audience, though infinitely polite, has a genius for detecting falsity and rejecting it. Before the first act was half over they knew what was wrong with *The Beloved Bandit*. It was a fake. It was a composite of all the plays Anne Nichols had written for Mr. Pitou's veteran Irish tenor, Fiske O'Hara. Those efforts at least had the virtue of honesty—and *The Beloved Bandit* was a dishonest facsimile.

As the first-act curtain descended to an ominous silence, I had no wish to see Mr. Pitou, Mrs. Harris or Priestly Morrison, but I wanted to be told by somebody that it hadn't gone as badly as I thought it had. I decided to mingle with the audience in the foyer and listen for their comments. It was a mistake. They might not have been at the theatre at all; they were talking about everything else under the sun. When the gong signalled them back into the theatre, I was reluctant to go back to my seat, but I had nowhere else to go. I sat through the second and third acts as grimly as the audience did. As the final curtain fell, there was not even a smattering of applause. A mass exodus started as if twenty-dollar gold pieces were being distributed free in the street outside, and the actors bowed to a solid phalanx of retreating backs.

I made my way backstage slowly, postponing as long as possible my face-to-face meeting with Mr. Pitou and Mrs. Harris, but when I got there they were nowhere to be seen. The stage manager, cheerful for the first time, waved a hearty greeting. "Never saw one go worse," he said smilingly. "I see them go all kinds of ways, but this was like spraying ether. You looking for the management?" I nodded. "They fled before the curtain came down. They said to tell you to get to the hotel as fast as you could."

To my surprise I heard the ringing laugh of Mrs. Harris coming through the transom as I opened the door on my first hotel-room conference. Mr. Pitou sat slumped in a chair, and Priestly Morrison seemed engrossed in a series of elaborate drawings he was executing on the blotter. But Mrs. Harris strode up and down as chirpy and cheerful as

though the audience had acclaimed the play with sixteen curtain calls. She waved to me as I came in and continued with what she had been saying.

"I'll tell you something, boys," she said, "the way it went tonight doesn't bother me one bit. Not a bit. You know why? First, this is Rochester, and what does Rochester know about anything but Kodaks? Second, this is an *audience* play. Give this play a chance with its own audience, boys, and you won't know you're watching the same play you saw tonight."

There was a heavy silence for a moment and then Priestly Morrison spoke in a mild voice. "Just what city do you think the audience for this play is hiding in?" he said, without looking up.

"Chicago," cried Mrs. Harris triumphantly. "And then New York. I tell you what I'm going to do, Gus," she went on, addressing Mr. Pitou, "and I'd advise you to do the same. I'm going to get out of here on the morning train. Priestly and Moss can watch the performance and do whatever they think necessary. Then you and I will jump on to Chicago next Monday night, and if the Chicago audience doesn't eat this play up, I'll eat my hat in the foyer. Come on, Moss, have a sandwich—you look pea-green."

Again I found that extreme emotion induced a monumental hunger. There was a table from room service in a corner and I wolfed more than half the sandwiches on it. I dared not look at Mr. Pitou and I sat as far away as possible from him. My relief was enormous when he finally rose and said, "Well, Priestly, I'll see you and Mouse in Chicago next Monday. I'll be standing in the foyer watching Mrs. Harris eat her hat." He laughed mirthlessly and slammed the door behind him.

THAT WEEK in Rochester was perhaps the most dismal I have ever spent with a play. I do not believe that more than thirty people, huddled in lonely groups, saw any single performance. By the end of the week, my very bones ached with the indescribable boredom of watching *The Beloved Bandit*. On Saturday night, with relief and even a glimmering of hope, I got on to the sleeper to Chicago with the company.

On Monday morning Mr. Pitou and Mrs. Harris arrived, and I learned with some dismay that I was being moved into Mr. Pitou's

room. When the gods were not smiling, Mr. Pitou was apt to cut corners rather sharply. That evening, however, there was a gay dinner in Mrs. Harris's suite, and such is the unfaltering faith of theatre folk in opening-night miracles that by the time we reached the theatre we were all of us quite blind to the fact that this was the very same play that had played with such dire results in Rochester the week before.

My heart sank a little as I glanced over the audience coming down the aisle. There was a goodly smattering of evening dresses and black ties among them and they had that look of threatening benevolence so native to first-night audiences. They would not, I thought, be nearly as polite as the opening-night audience in Rochester. I was not wrong.

As the curtain rose on that appalling set the Chicago audience, after an initial gasp of disbelief, broke as one into a gale of laughter. Just as they grew quiet again, Joseph Regan made his entrance in a way that he had never done before. It was his own impromptu invention and he never bothered, then or afterwards, to explain why he did it. He crept in through the fire-place and interpolated a line of his own authorship, which said something to the effect that "every day was Christmas when the Irish came to town." I was conscious that the audience was laughing again, only now they were murmuring at the same time, and suddenly a grey-haired gentleman rose from his seat in the third row and walked up the aisle. I turned to Priestly Morrison and whispered, "Who is that and why is everyone watching him?"

"That," said Priestly Morrison, not even bothering to whisper, "is Ashton Stevens, Chicago's leading critic, and I believe he's going home."

What followed is told quickly enough, for it happened with frightening rapidity. Before Joseph Regan had intoned too many more "macushlas" and "mavourneens" the audience started streaming up the aisle, and by the time the curtain of the first act fell the seats all round me were empty. This time I spared myself the second and third acts. Instead, I walked up and down the stage-door alley. The wind from Lake Michigan whistled up it but I hardly noticed it. I could think only of just how and when the blow I most feared would fall.

If I lost my job, what lay ahead for me? The fur vault again? I knew, more surely than before, how hard come by was the job of office boy in a theatrical office. But I had tasted the heady wine of the theatre,

and I could not face the fact that by this time next week I might well be a stock-room clerk or a messenger boy. At eleven o'clock I knocked on the door of Mrs. Harris's suite. There was no need to delay whatever might be in store for me.

Mrs. Harris, to her everlasting credit, was valiant in defeat. "You just missed seeing me trying to eat my hat, Moss," she called to me as I came in. She laughed and crossed to where Mr. Pitou was slumped down in the depths of the sofa. "Gus," she said, "we guaranteed the theatre here for four weeks, didn't we?" He nodded without looking up at her. "Four thousand a week, wasn't it?" she asked. Again Mr. Pitou nodded wordlessly.

"Well, Gus," she went on, "my suggestion is we pay the theatre off and close here tomorrow night. What would you say our total loss on the show would be? With the guarantee and bringing the company back to New York and paying them off?"

Mr. Pitou took an envelope out of his pocket and slowly covered the back of it with figures. While he scribbled, no one spoke. When he had finished, his reply was so faint that Mrs. Harris had to ask him to repeat it. "Forty-five thousand dollars," he said.

I swallowed painfully. I had started it all in a kitchen in the Bronx on a quiet Sunday afternoon!

"Can we leave the scenery here?" asked Mrs. Harris.

"Nope," said the company manager, speaking up for the first time. "We gotta pay to cart it to the city dump."

Mrs. Harris laughed. "Couldn't we find out where Ashton Stevens lives and leave it on his doorstep?" she said. "That set and a dramatic critic deserve each other."

Morrison crossed to where I was standing and laid a hand on my shoulder. "I'd spare myself reading Ashton Stevens in the morning, Moss," he said kindly. "Anyway, you'll come back here with another one some day and make him eat his words. Won't he, Gus?"

Mr. Pitou did not reply. He rose from the sofa and made his way slowly to the door. "Good night," he said in a muted and forlorn voice, "I'm going to bed." He signalled to me to follow him and we walked in silence to the room we were to share. He's waiting till we get inside, I thought, then he'll tell me.

Mr. Pitou unlocked the door and threw the key with a crash on the

glass-topped chest of drawers; still in silence, he began to undress. There is something terribly disconcerting in seeing your employer stand before you in long winter underwear. I was so suffused with embarrassment that I did not catch his first few words when finally he spoke. To my surprise he was talking not about *The Beloved Bandit* but about the receipts of his other shows.

"May Robson played to under a thousand in Flint, Michigan, Saturday night; and Fiske O'Hara played to four hundred in Saginaw. I don't know what the hell is happening." He went on to list the grosses of the other shows and, as he talked on, his bewilderment grew, for just the lack of the tried-and-true Anne Nichols touch was no logical answer to such an over-all slump.

What was happening, of course, though neither of us knew it then, was that the silent movies, the magic of early radio and the mass-produced motor-car were making enormous inroads on the habits of theatre-going America. "The road" as the theatre knew it, and that king-pin of family entertainment, vaudeville, were disappearing with frightening swiftness. It did not occur to Mr. Pitou, however, that he was witnessing the end of an era.

What occurred to me quite sharply, listening to Mr. Pitou talk, was the fact that he was not mentioning either *The Beloved Bandit* or myself. It could mean, of course, only one thing—I was safe! I made a solemn vow to myself never again to type the words "Act One" on a piece of white paper as long as I lived and I slept soundly that night for the first time in a week.

Mr. Pitou was not the most cheerful of companions on the train back to New York, but even Ashton Stevens's notice of *The Beloved Bandit*, which I read surreptitiously in the men's room, failed to depress me unduly. He had not actually written a criticism of the play. He had run, instead, an obituary notice bordered in black, which began: "There died at the Adelphi Theatre last night . . ." It was a cruel joke but nothing about *The Beloved Bandit* seemed to matter much now. I still had my job.

That foolish illusion was dispelled as the train roared into Grand Central. At that moment, Mr. Pitou, who had seemed to be dozing, opened his eyes. "The way things are, Mouse," he said slowly, "with business on the road so bad and all, I'll go back to sharing Miss Belle

as secretary and get John, the lift-man, to empty the waste-paper baskets and mail the letters."

I stared at him for a moment and then said, "Oh."

People were beginning to rise from their seats now, and the porter was between us getting the bags down from the racks. I called across to Mr. Pitou, "Is it all right if I come up to see you once in a while—in case things change?"

"Oh, sure," he replied, "do that."

By the time I reached the platform Mr. Pitou was lost in a swirl of people. I stood for a few moments uncertainly; then I picked up my suit-case and headed for the subway to the Bronx.

NEW YORK is not a city to return to in defeat. I love the city of my birth and I always return to it with a lift of the heart. But on this, my first return, I felt as so many must feel who come from the little towns to challenge the city—I felt swallowed up by it, erased; and I felt a wretched awareness that the best thing I could do was to forget the theatre.

As I walked out of the subway station at Jackson Avenue, and started the three-block trudge home, I decided not to tell my father or mother that I was without a job. I wouldn't bring my bad news home with me. The sense of hopelessness within me was already heavier than the suit-case I carried in my hand.

Suddenly I stopped, astonished at the sight of my father sitting in the window of the small cigar shop about a block from where we lived. It was a little hole-in-the-wall cigar shop, and there was usually a little Cuban man sitting in the window from morning until late at night, endlessly cutting and rolling tobacco leaves into cheap cigars. My father did not see me; he was bent over the cigar board, his fingers deftly rolling the leaves. My heart went out to him. It had been a grim family jest for him to remark when things were bad, "Well, if things get any worse, I'll have to go to work in the window round the corner." They had never quite come to that low pass. What could have happened in the two weeks that I had been away?

I hurried as I approached the house, and climbed the four flights to our apartment. When my mother opened the door, I immediately saw that her eyes were red-rimmed with weeping.

"What's the matter, Ma—what's happened?" I asked. She led me gently to the front room, which was my mother's and father's bedroom but which we disguised as the parlour, sat down on the bed and motioned me to sit beside her.

"Aunt Kate died while you were away," she said and burst into quiet weeping. After a moment or two, she told me that it had all happened in the space of a single night. They had been called to the hospital at two o'clock in the morning, and at four Aunt Kate had died as they sat beside her bed. It had been cancer but of the painless variety, and she had regained consciousness just a little before the end and had smiled at them and asked after me. My father, unforgiving while she lived, had behaved with great gentleness and understanding at her death. He had insisted on giving her the kind of funeral he knew she would have liked, and we were hopelessly in debt thereby. So that was why he sat in the window round the corner—doing at last the thing he feared and hated most, in order to see that a woman he had bitterly disliked was buried with decency and respect.

The first thought that flashed through my mind as my mother spoke was: "I should have told her," for I had not told Aunt Kate that a play of mine was to be produced. I had secretly dreamed of saying nothing until I escorted her to the theatre for the opening night in New York. Both the dream and Aunt Kate were gone now, but for the moment I could feel no sense of grief—I seemed to be drained of all emotion.

"How much did the funeral cost?" I asked my mother.

"Two hundred dollars," she answered. "We have to pay it off at ten dollars a week. It was wonderful of them to trust us, wasn't it?" I nodded. I must take the first job I could get.

My mother stood up and wiped her eyes. "I was just going to serve supper," she said. "The boarders have been very nice about everything but we can't afford to have them leave now."

I went to the room I shared with my brother and opened my suitcase. There on the top lay the tattered and thumb-marked script of *The Beloved Bandit*, and carefully preserved between two shirts was a clean programme I had saved for Aunt Kate. I tore it into little pieces. Then I went to the bathroom and turned on the water taps full, so that no one might hear me crying.

The next morning I was in the subway by seven thirty, marking the

want ads in *The New York Times* as I rode down-town. Stock-room clerk, shipping-room packer, errand boy—it didn't really matter now which one I got.

I had decided to start the rounds at Fourteenth Street and work my way up-town, but at Times Square, almost before I knew what I was doing, I began to push my way to the door. By the time I had wrenched my way out I knew why I was getting off and what I was going to do. Before I settled down into drudgery, I was going out to the cemetery to make my own farewell.

I changed to the Brooklyn train, and on the long ride out to Cypress Hills I felt a wonderful quietude settle over me and I rather enjoyed the long walk through the cemetery to where Aunt Kate lay buried. At last I came to the end of a little path and there in front of me was the grave of my aunt, some of the funeral greenery still upon it. Next to it was the grave of my grandfather.

I stood there not knowing quite what to do. I had been impelled to come here by some force within me of terrible urgency, but now I could think only that here were the two people whose lives had meant the most to mine and what a pitiful waste their lives had been to themselves.

They were both better, I knew, than life had allowed them to be; and standing there I suddenly realized how much of their hopes had been unconsciously pinned on me. I had been their bulwark against complete defeat.

Far from feeling sorrow or self-pity, I began to shake with an uncontrollable rage. To take a job as shipping clerk or errand boy was no worse than hundreds of boys in my circumstances were doing every day of the week. But, standing by the graves of my aunt and my grandfather, I was damned if I would. I owed it to them not to; and out of my rage I resolved that, come what may, I was sticking to the theatre and I would never turn back.

And the truth of the matter is that, from that moment on, I never did.

I made my way back to the subway, and as the train approached Times Square I made a sudden decision: now was as good a time as any for me to try to be an actor. I would never have less to lose. And I was no longer a theatrical innocent. All I needed was beginner's luck.

5

I GOT OFF the train at Times Square, straightened my tie, fixed the handkerchief in my breast pocket at a more jaunty angle and stole a glance at myself in the mirror of a chewing-gum machine. Suddenly it seemed to me I looked like an actor. I knew the look well. The too eager, too bright smile, the knowing air. I practised the look in the mirror for a moment and reminded myself that I had been a theatrical office boy myself. I thought I could count on my acquaintances among the enemy to get me in to see a casting director.

Cannily, I chose an office boy who I knew had also had difficulty saying "no" to actors. Irving Morrison, George Tyler's office boy, was a kind and good-hearted fellow. He showed only a mild surprise at the news that I had turned actor, and asked me to wait until he could get me in to see Mr. Tyler.

I found an inconspicuous place among the others who were already waiting, and listened to their easy bantering talk. With the politeness characteristic of the profession one of the actors turned to me and asked, "What have you been doing lately?"

I knew the lingo well enough to shrug my shoulders and answer, "Nothing on Broadway," and let my voice trail off.

It was no doubt obvious to them all that I had never set foot on a stage but they included me in their chatter as though I were a veteran. I listened intently, for the leads that the grapevine conveyed were usually accurate. A man was talking now and I pricked up my ears. "I don't know how they think they're going to cast it," he sniffed contemptuously, "but they're offering twenty-five dollars for someone to play Smithers in a revival of *The Emperor Jones* over at the Mayfair Theatre."

I got up and quietly made my way to the door. Twenty-five dollars a week was ten dollars more than I had ever earned in my life. The Mayfair Theatre in Forty-fourth Street was a tiny little affair of no more than two hundred seats but it seemed big enough to me as I climbed the stairs to the manager's office. A little breathlessly I told the manager what I had come for. He pushed a copy of the printed play across the desk towards me and said "Read it."

It did not occur to me to be in the least nervous. I opened the book and plunged in. I had read Eugene O'Neill's play before, and since the part of Smithers is that of a dissolute cockney trader I had only to recall my father's accent to make the words ring true. The fact that I was eighteen years old and Smithers was supposed to be a drunken and battered sixty did not faze either me or the manager. When I finished the scene he said, "It's not Equity and the salary is twenty dollars a week."

"I thought the part paid twenty-five," I said hesitantly, only because I was afraid of seeming too anxious.

"Well, if we're stuck, I guess it does," he answered pleasantly. "Go downstairs and tell Gilpin you're Smithers."

I raced down the stairs. I was an actor on Broadway! I knew that the production would be shoddy and threadbare but what did it matter? What mattered was that I had outwitted life.

My first glimpse of Charles Gilpin, the great Negro actor, was a fairly typical one. He was not quite sober and he was in a smouldering rage. He was directing this revival of the play himself, for he had played the Emperor Jones over a thousand times. I waited until there was a pause in the rehearsal and presented myself to him. He looked at me with sombre, disenchanted eyes and sighed softly. "All right," he said quietly, "wait."

Charles Gilpin was the greatest actor of his race, limited not by his own talent but by the parts the Negro could play in the theatre. Other than *The Emperor Jones*, no parts of any stature ever came his way. Not unnaturally, this embittered an already hostile nature, and he took what solace he could find in alcohol.

I watched while he rehearsed the others and then he signalled to me—he was ready to mark out the first act, which is played by the Emperor and Smithers alone. All my bravado deserted me; I shook, stammered and constantly lost my place. Stolidly and wearily Gilpin plodded on: "You stand there . . . now I come over to you . . . now I go back and sit on the throne . . . when the drums start you walk to the door. . . ." Finally it was over. He looked at me and sighed. "Did they tell you when we open?" he asked. I shook my head. "Day after tomorrow—you better learn the words tonight."

I gathered up enough courage to stammer, "Could you tell me how

you want it played?" For the first time he smiled. "You ain't as bad as you think you are." He chuckled. "We'll have a hassle with it tomorrow." And he was on his way.

That evening when I announced that I was an actor and had to commit my part to memory my mother once again construed this to mean some sort of homework I had neglected during the day. Everyone was shooed away, just as years later, long after I had become an established playwright, she would say, "Don't go into the room now—he's doing homework," her tone implying that I was writing "I won't do it again" on the blackboard. My mother never believed that any work one could do at home was quite honest.

The part of Smithers is not a long one and I learned it with ease. The next day, as he had promised, Mr. Gilpin gave me a "hassle" with it. I had very little time for alarm as to how good I might be, for the dress rehearsal was that evening, and my chief concern was the fact that I did not know how to put make-up on my face and was too ashamed to admit it. I solved this ignominious problem by hanging round Gray's drugstore during the dinner hour until another actor came along to purchase some make-up, and, under the guise of being puzzled as to just how to get the effect I wanted, I let him suggest the paraphernalia I needed to look like the disreputable Smithers.

Later that evening as I looked at myself in the dressing-room mirror I was so delighted with the effect—the blacked-out teeth, rusty grey stubble, drooping eyelids and thin-lipped sneer—that I sailed through the dress rehearsal. On opening night, I had only a mild flutter of nerves as I stood waiting in the wings. Mine was the first entrance; but I was rescued from stage fright by a sudden happy thought that flashed through my mind as the curtain went up. "Well, I'm not wrapping packages or delivering telegrams for Western Union!"

Gilpin, who came on shortly afterwards, was at his best that night. He was a spectacular and memorable Emperor Jones, and I played the rest of the act with him as though I had been playing it for months. At the end of the play he received an ovation, and the next morning the notices were glowing for Gilpin and, to my intense surprise, excellent for me as well. They confirmed my belief that I had nothing to do but to act from now on, and only glory lay ahead. I could hardly wait to get to the theatre that night and have the curtain go up.



Fortunately, I did not see Mr. Gilpin before the performance. I did not know that he was a little less than sober that evening and that the management had decided that rather than refund the money they would push him out on the stage and take a chance. I suppose they were right in not warning me beforehand. I would have been too downright scared even to set foot on the stage.

Gilpin made his entrance stumblingly, and made directly for the throne, where he sat down heavily and proceeded to go to sleep. The audience sensed nothing strange in this, for his behaviour was in keeping with the part. I, however, was openly panic-stricken, and the stage manager, seeing it, hissed to me from the wings, "Shake him—go ahead, shake him. Keep playing."

Too frightened to do anything else, I walked over to the throne and shook him as hard as I could. He opened his eyes and looked up at me wonderingly. Again the stage manager hissed, "Keep shaking him—get him up on his feet."

And again I did as I was told. I pulled him to his feet and, hanging on to his arm to steady him, I yelled my first line into his ear. Astonishingly, he answered with the correct line. He shook his head a few times, like an old lion at bay, and to my horror thrust my hand roughly away and sat down on the throne again.

Then haltingly Gilpin began to play. His voice was thick, and he jumbled the cues, but he sat on the throne steadying himself until he regained something like control, and then he rose and even seemed to play with something of his old power, though every so often he would suddenly grab hold of me to stop himself from falling. The audience seemed entirely unaware of all this, and when the first-act curtain finally came down—a full ten years later, it seemed to me—a very good hand accompanied it.

With the help of a pot of steaming black coffee during intermission Gilpin snapped back completely and was fine for the rest of the play. At the end, as we stood taking our bows, he whispered to me, his eyes twinkling, "You're learning to act fast, Smithers." And that was all he ever said about it, that night or any other night, for the same thing occurred, not too often, but often enough. And each time it left me shaken.

Nevertheless, I was learning things about the craft of acting that I

still think sound. It seems to me that acting is more a fortunate quirk of the personality than anything else. The great actors all have one thing in common—a curious inborn chemistry that fastens every eye in the audience upon them and fades the other actors into the scenery. It is sometimes called “star quality,” and, as J. M. Barrie has said, it is like charm in a woman: “If you have it, you don’t need to have anything else; and if you don’t have it, it doesn’t much matter what else you have.”

I dimly perceived some of this early on, and it was to save me from wasting valuable years. After my auspicious beginning, however, I smugly concluded that I myself had found my proper niche in life, and I began to plan the next step in my acting career as *The Emperor Jones* came to the end of its fifteen-week run. Although I had received good notices, I knew that my performance in a mere revival would have remained largely unobserved by almost everyone connected with the theatre. I decided not to be choosy in spite of my high opinion of myself, but to take whatever came along, even a walk-on. Once again I turned to Irving Morrison, and, kindly as ever, he obtained a letter of introduction for me signed by the producer George Tyler.

Mr. Tyler had placed in rehearsal an English play, *The Constant Nymph*, and since it called for a number of extras in the crowd scene the letter was to the English director of the play, Basil Dean. On the morning after *The Emperor Jones* closed, I presented myself to the stage manager half an hour before the rehearsal began, and waited for Mr. Dean to arrive. He appeared briskly enough, and the tension that he brought with him did not dissipate until the rehearsal was over. He was a famous director and a gifted one, but his cast were literally frightened to death of him. As he walked in I saw the stage manager hold up my letter of introduction, but Mr. Dean waved it impatiently away. Quite peremptorily, without a greeting of any kind to anyone, he began to rehearse, and all morning the hapless actors perspired and struggled under his cold appraising eye and acid tongue.

After the break for lunch the pantomime of the letter was repeated, with the same results. Mr. Dean plunged headlong into the rehearsal. Nothing suited him, though his displeasure seemed to focus especially on the character man. The character man was a fine-looking fellow of about sixty, but he was not a very able actor and Mr. Dean’s annoyance

made him even less sure-footed. He fumbled and stumbled for the good reason that he was frozen with fear. Late in the afternoon, just before the rehearsal ended, Mr. Dean suddenly addressed him, quietly but with a deadly precision: "Would you mind doing that again?"

"Do what again, Mr. Dean?" asked the man, flushing.

"Why, that splendid bit of acting you perpetrated just now," replied Mr. Dean with a sweetness that was almost purring.

The character man moved his tongue over his lips and then made a hideous mistake. "I'm pleased you thought so, Mr. Dean," he said with a hollow little laugh. "I'm rather fond of that bit myself. I wondered if you would notice it."

"Notice it?" said Mr. Dean. "Indeed, indeed! I have been riveted." He smiled dangerously at the character man and addressed the rest of the company with a disarming charm that was belied only by the cruelty of his words. "In my many years in the theatre, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have witnessed many kinds of acting, but I have never seen anything quite like our colleague's performance before. I suggest that you all come here to the front with me and watch it."

The company stirred uneasily, but actors who need their jobs are defenceless against a director. They gathered at the front of the rehearsal hall. Mr. Dean lit a cigarette and settled back in his chair. "Do go ahead, old chap," he said amiably. "Do exactly what you did before. We are all agog." There was a bloodcurdling pause and for a moment it seemed as though the character man would protest, but his head suddenly bent over the script. He was like some treed animal anxious to have the killing over with. He could not be blamed for the absurdity of what he was doing, but it was acting of the most embarrassing kind. Fortunately, it was soon over. Mr. Dean had made his point, cruel as it was, and he did not comment. "Ten o'clock tomorrow, ladies and gentlemen," he said, and left the hall.

I grabbed up my letter and ran after him. At the lift I trapped him, for though he pushed the button angrily the lift did not appear. Without a word he took the letter I mutely held out to him, ripped it open, glanced at the contents, and for the first time I felt those glacial eyes turn directly upon me. "We want only English actors for this play," he said coldly, crumpling the letter and letting it fall to the floor.

"I just played an English part, Mr. Dean," I replied bravely.

"Well, you must have done it very badly," said Mr. Dean, and with that the lift came and he disappeared into it.

It was beginning to grow dark as I started back to the New Amsterdam Theatre to report to Irving Morrison. I walked slowly, the lights of Broadway coming alive all round me—and I came to a bitter conclusion. Mr. Dean's conduct had been inhuman, but he was right—the character man was an actor of little talent who long since should have faced that fact. Had he, like myself, with not much else than a desire to act and an infatuation for the theatre, set forth long ago on the path that led to this afternoon's deplorable failure? Behind this afternoon lay the failure and waste of an entire lifetime, and in the immediacy of the fear that clutched my heart I felt an irrevocable "There but for the grace of God go I." For the first time I faced up to the grim possibility that a passion for the theatre and a deep desire to be an actor might not be enough. The actual truth, when I allowed myself to know it, was simply that, in spite of a lucky beginning, I would never be more than a passable actor and at best an adequate one—and there is no more damning word to apply to acting than "adequate."

It was not an easy conclusion. To give up my childhood dream was to relinquish a secret part of myself that had sustained me through the years. All the anxieties and insecurities of my years and my nature seemed to rise up in defence of the dream I had cherished for so long. But I suddenly and sharply knew once and for all that however I remained attached to the theatre it would not be as an actor.

A prime example of what I mean by luck now led me unexpectedly into six years of apprenticeship for all the years that were to follow. Through a chance meeting with a friend of Pitou days, I walked into a job directing a little-theatre group. As a director I was a raw amateur, but not for nothing had I watched Priestly Morrison and Basil Dean. At first my knees knocked together, but I found I could control a cast and, to my jubilation, the performances I put on resulted in a job as assistant social director at a camp for adults known as Camp Utopia. It was a backbreaking job, since all entertainment—parties, contests, plays and musicals—was provided by the social director and his staff. I was an exhausted fifteen pounds lighter at the end of the season, but I had discovered that summers at camp could fit in with a plan I was weaving to take me back to the professional theatre.

I had thought long and hard that summer, and I had come to the conclusion that the only way for me to get past a stage door again was to write a play. If I could get two or three little-theatre groups to direct in the evenings, my days would be free for writing all winter long, and a social director's job in summer would see me through the year. As I left Camp Utopia at the end of the summer, all this seemed conclusive, almost an accomplished fact.

A day later I was home again, ringing the door-bell I had rung for so many years and waiting for the door to open. It was a curious home-coming. I think there is a moment when we see our parents suddenly, for the first time, as people. The precise moment happened for me when my mother opened the door of our flat. I stood in the hallway blinking at her, and even as we threw our arms round each other and her first words reached my ears I was conscious of hearing her voice as a stranger might hear it—not as her son—without the clatter of a thousand admonitions and warnings echoing in my ears. It was a young voice with music in it. I looked at her before I kissed her, and I was surprised to find her face still young, not lined and careworn like the face I carried in my mind's eye.

Behind her my father stood waiting, sad and defeated, a stranger, too. Behind him my brother stood, grave and unsmiling. My brother and I had lived all of our lives together, yet between us there existed only the slimmest line of communication. Why could we find no words for each other? Was it the seven-year difference in age that separated us? Bernie had been only five years old when I was already out in the world, working in the music shop in the afternoons. Now he was twelve and I was nineteen, and I felt a compelling need to try and bridge the gap between us.

In the first day or two at home I became sharply aware that my father had receded more and more into the dim background and that the major decisions of family life were being left to me. This is not unusual in families of our circumstances. The bread-winner, whether he likes it or not, gradually assumes a role that is not rightly his; when this happens there is a twisting of family relationships. It is not surprising that my brother should have rejected a brother he had never known, and refused to accept the substitute father I had become.

Somehow or other, I decided, I must manage to take him away with

me to camp the following summer. A job as a waiter's helper in the dining-room, perhaps. If I could also contrive to get my father a job, our combined salaries, if we watched every penny, might enable us to move to a different flat, away from the ugliness in which I had spent my first nineteen years. If it did nothing more than serve to bring me a little closer to Bernie, that witty and sweet-natured human being, it was worth the try.

I DIDN'T let a moment of time slip away now, and I was launched even more quickly than I had dared hope. By mid-October I was travelling daily to my old little-theatre group and to another in the far reaches of the Bronx, and by November I had started a play. The combined fees from the two groups I directed amounted to less than twenty-eight dollars a week, but it was enough to get thinly by on. The important thing was that I had my days free to write.

I wrote slowly, carefully and happily every day, unconsciously using every timeworn device I had ever seen, blithely convinced that what I was setting down was completely new and even daring! I finished the play in mid-February on a note of triumph, but made myself put the manuscript away for a week. I knew that veteran playwrights always let a play cool off before they read it through again for a cold, unemotional appraisal and I was pathetically eager to use every professional trick I knew.

Accordingly, on a bright February morning a week after I had written *The Curtain Slowly Falls*, I went into the bathroom, locked the door and, settling myself with a pillow behind me in the empty bath, I opened the closely written pages. The play's awfulness did not dawn on me slowly—the full impact of its hackneyed dreariness hit me by the sixth page. I lay there a long time after I had finished it, wondering at my own *naïveté*. Well, the time had not been wasted: I would not make these same errors again.

I wanted to begin another play immediately. But I would have to wait. In late February and early March the big camps and hotels engaged their social directors for the coming summer and, with only one summer's experience, getting a job that would include my father and my brother was not going to be easy. On that score I was determined, but by the end of March I was desperate. By April only the dregs were

left, and one unlucky April day I arrived for an interview with Mr. Axeler (that is not his real name), a partner in a summer camp in Vermont which I shall call the Half Moon Country Club. He was a short, stocky little man with a bright, metallic eye and the mark of a crank stamped clearly all over him.

I was not especially put off, however, by this, my first impression of him. Mr. Axeler had charm, and so genuine appeared his interest in my art-and-uplift approach to the summer's dramatic programme—my plans to produce George Bernard Shaw and Eugene O'Neill had appalled most camp owners—and so refreshing was his candour about the former level of his camp's entertainment that very soon I was disarmed. Mr. A. deftly suggested that audiences invariably rose to an appreciation of what was offered them, and moreover, he announced, he would enjoy taking the gamble.

After fifteen minutes of listening to Mr. Axeler talk, I was convinced that I had fallen into a tub of honey. He said he would be glad to find a job for my brother in the kitchen and place my father in charge of the canteen in the social hall, in return for a small concession on my part. Would I be willing to go up to camp two weeks early and get the social hall in readiness for the Decoration Day week-end? Noticing a flicker of doubt, he opened a drawer of his desk and drew out a legal-looking bit of paper.

"I'm fixing the contract to include your father and brother," he said. "Here, just fill in their names and sign it." He smiled that wonderfully candid smile of his and pushed the paper across the desk towards me. As I had suspected, the salary was ridiculously small and my father and brother were to get nothing but board and lodging; their salary was to come out of the pool of tips that was divided up among the help at the end of the season.

"Maybe we don't pay as much as some other camps do," said Mr. Axeler as I sat staring at the contract, "but we make up for it in a lot of other ways. By the end of the summer you'll want to pay *us* for giving you such a fine holiday." He chuckled, and offered me a pen. Before I had time to blot my signature he had somehow whisked the paper from the desk and was escorting me to the door, cordially shaking my hand and beaming good will.

"Anything you need—drop in any time and just ask me for it. I'll

have the train tickets for you for May fifteenth, and I'll be up at camp waiting for you. You've done a very good thing for yourself today," he called jocularly after me as he closed the door, that forthright smile still on his lips.

THAT EVENING, using all my powers of persuasion, I outlined to my family the change I contemplated making in their lives. To separate my mother and father for the first time in their married life, to put all our belongings in storage, to send my mother off to live alone in a furnished room for the next four months was no small thing to ask. I well knew my mother's intense feeling for the tiny world of her family, but, to my complete surprise, it was she who was the first to see the wisdom of the move, and her quick and unexpected agreement had an electrifying effect on all of us.

We began to plan immediately—even talking of the possibility, at the end of the summer, of finding a small flat and doing without boarders to help pay the rent. The prospect of sitting down to a meal by ourselves delighted us all. We became a little intoxicated with excitement, and when we went to bed my brother spoke to me not as a stranger, I thought, for almost the first time.

"What's camp like?" he asked, as we lay in the dark.

I tried to tell him and I spoke also of the good times I hoped we would have together, rushing headlong into an intimacy that he was not yet prepared to give. But at the moment it was enough to fall asleep with a job safely tucked under the pillow and the knowledge that, come the autumn, my eyes would not open each morning on that same grimy courtyard.

The next two weeks seemed to fly by with an unholy speed, and in the midst of these last hectic days I suddenly realized that I did not possess the blazer and white flannel trousers which were as necessary to a social director as a suit of armour to a Knight of the Round Table. I could not go to camp without them, yet I knew that by the time we paid a deposit for the storage and moving people there wouldn't be enough left to buy a handkerchief.

Well, Mr. Axeler had said, *Anything you need, just ask for it.* It would be embarrassing, but I would have to ask him for a small advance.

Mr. Axeler understood. Of course I must have the blazer and white flannels; perhaps even grey flannels as well. There was one little hitch, however: his partners had a strict rule against advances. But he had the solution. A dear friend of his owned a haberdashery shop in Eighth Avenue. I was to go there and select whatever I needed, have it sent direct to the Half Moon and charge it to him personally. I thanked him profusely. I could hardly wait to get over to that haberdashery shop.

At that time I was absolutely clothes-crazy. Secretly I craved the absurd get-ups most male guests wore round camp—the sky-blue turtle-neck sweaters, the striped jackets with brass buttons—with a real passion. When I stepped inside that shop in Eighth Avenue I proceeded to go on what can best be described as a clothes drunk. The blazer and the white flannel trousers were bought almost without looking at them, and I went on to splurge on sweaters, shirts, socks and ties; kerchiefs to wear twisted round the neck, reversible two-toned pull-overs, a beach jacket, and the crowning purchase of all, an utterly useless but completely irresistible smoking-jacket with what appeared to be a coat of arms embroidered in gold on the breast pocket. I stood in front of the mirror in it, staring at myself absolutely enraptured.

By the time I finished, I had bought about a hundred and thirty-five dollars worth of clothes. Mr. Axeler's friend, the owner, was not there, but the assistant, himself a little flushed at so large a sale, promised to explain everything to him. I staggered out of the shop wonderfully warm inside. I knew I had bought wildly, that I could not afford any of it, but none of that seemed to matter in the least.

During the remaining days I opened each package over and over in my mind. I even found a one-act play that would give me a chance to wear the smoking-jacket on the stage. My impatience to be off was doubled by the fact that each day that passed was one day less we would have to spend in that hated flat.

Yet when the day at last arrived, and I looked for the last time on the streaked wallpaper on the bedroom walls, the elation that I had expected to feel was strangely missing. Perhaps the end of anything is somehow a little sad. Perhaps it seemed the final erasure of my aunt and my grandfather, whose living presence these rooms had known. We must all have felt something of the sort, for we walked down the

four flights of stairs to the street without speaking, and stood, still silent, on the front stoop. The van was already at the kerb, mercifully cutting short the good-byes. For my mother there was time for nothing but a quick kiss to each of us before she had to return upstairs with the moving men, and a wave from the front window as we turned the corner.

6

THE RIDE to Vermont was an overnight one; and by coach it was long, hot and uncomfortable. At six o'clock in the morning we scrambled on to the platform with our suit-cases but the car that was supposed to meet us was nowhere in sight. We sat down on our suit-cases in the empty station and waited. "They must have had a flat tyre," I said cheerfully. "Bad beginning, good ending. Isn't that what you always say, Pop?" He did not answer and I knew at that instant that something was rotten in both Denmark and Vermont.

At eight thirty a car drew up to the station with a fearful grinding of brakes. The driver called out of the side of his mouth, "You the social director? Get in."

We started the forty-five miles to camp in dispirited silence, but as I stared at those beautiful Vermont hills and the fresh, clean fields my spirits shifted from low to high and I began to sing. How could anything be really bad in this beautiful setting?

Suddenly the car made a sharp turn round a bend and I saw a battered sign, hanging crookedly from rusty chains between two entrance posts, that proclaimed ENTRANCE—HALF MOON COUNTRY CLUB. First impressions are likely to be true ones, and the first impression one received of the Half Moon was one of slovenliness. We got our things out in front of the main building, a haphazard, ugly mass of wood, dented fly screens and torn yellow window blinds. The driver rattled off without a word, and my brother shot me a look. No words were needed.

"All camps look like this before they open," I said with unconvincing assurance. "Let's go and find somebody."

I led the way inside and they followed me through a rather large lounge with a sagging ceiling and enormous upholstered chairs all garishly loose-covered. We proceeded on through the empty dining-

room and into the grimy, smoke-blackened kitchen. The stove was thickly caked with last year's soot; but a coffee-pot stood there and we made straight for it like lost souls. I sighed with relief to find it half full and still warm.

While we stood by the stove gulping the coffee a young man with a fat, good-natured face, covered at the moment with dust and wisps of straw, came in through the screen door. "So you got here," he said, addressing me. "The new social director, huh? This your father and brother?"

I nodded. "I was beginning to think this was the wrong day."

"Oh, no," he answered. "Mr. Axeler expected you all right. My name's Herb Morris," he added, as we shook hands all round. "I'm the desk clerk but right now I'm unpacking new crockery. Want me to take you to your bunks?"

"Thanks," I replied. "But where is Mr. Axeler?"

He gestured vaguely towards the outdoors. "Out there somewhere," he said. "You can't miss him. He's on a horse."

"On a horse?" I asked.

"Never gets off it all summer," said Herb, and smiled broadly. "He runs the whole place from that damn horse. We call him the Mad Cossack. Want me to help you with your stuff?" He moved towards our suit-cases and bundles, and we followed him upstairs to a cubby-hole under the roof where my father was to sleep. There was no window, only a skylight, and though it was a cool spring morning the airless, sun-baked cubicle was already sweltering.

"Here, let me open the skylight for you," Herb said. "It's not so terrible when it's open, but you're a dead duck if it rains during the night and the darn thing won't shut."

My father was sitting on the edge of the uncovered mattress, staring about him, and I could see that he was shaken. My brother was looking directly at me again and saying nothing.

"Why don't you unpack your stuff, Pop," I said. I turned to Herb again. "Where do my brother and I sleep?" I asked.

"Oh, your brother bunks in Buckingham Palace with the rest of the kitchen help and me. You're by yourself in the Bastille."

Buckingham Palace turned out to be a converted chicken-house with a long row of army beds lined up against each wall. One had to stoop

to enter it and stay bent over until one stood in the middle under its V-shaped ceiling. "Take this bed here next to mine, Bernie," Herb said. "I found out last year these are the only two beds that don't get the smell from the kitchen. Ready for a look at the Bastille?" he finished brightly, turning to me. I followed him out without looking at my brother's stricken face. Herb whistled cheerfully beside me. "It's pretty crummy, all right," he said blithely, "but if you need to make your tuition for school, like me and the waiters and the rest, why, once he's got you up this far away, what can you do?"

"Well, I'm not going to stay here," I said hotly, "I can tell you that."

He seemed genuinely surprised. "You're not?" he asked. "You've got something to go back to?"

"No," I admitted, "but I'm not going to stay here."

"I see," said Herb politely. "Well, in case you do stay, there's the social hall." He pointed to a small, unpainted building a few hundred yards ahead. It was open on three sides and festooned across the front end with a score of what had once been Japanese lanterns.

"Not exactly the Palace," said Herb, watching me stare.

"Just show me where I bunk," I said. "I'll have to stay here for to-night anyway."

Silently he pointed to a tin-roofed shack. He sighed. "That's it," he said, "that's the Bastille. It's all yours."

I stared at it. "But that's a tool shed, isn't it?"

"You hit it right on the nose." Herb walked ahead of me and pushed open the door. "Phew," he exclaimed. "You could fry eggs in here with that tin roof." He stood aside to let me enter.

I did not linger long. Rust-coloured water had run down the walls and formed little pools on the earthen floor which was rudely covered with wooden slats. Old tooth-paste tubes, bottle caps and other trash lay scattered underneath the slats. Whatever else he may have been, my predecessor was not a neat man.

I quickly rejoined Herb outside, took a great lungful of fresh air, and then threw myself face down on the ground. "I'm dead tired," I said. It was true. I was suddenly desperately tired.

Herb sat down beside me and chewed on a blade of grass for a while. "It won't be easy to get that fare back to New York out of him," he finally said. "That's been tried before."

I sat up and looked back at the tool shed. "No, I'm going to stay, Herb. I've got no choice." And I told him of our plight.

"Yeah, I guess you're stuck," he said. "But you know something? Now that you know you're hooked it won't seem so terrible. You'll see—that's the way it was with me." He rose and stood peering down at me. "Anything else I can do before I kick off?"

"No, thanks, Herb," I answered gratefully. "You've helped a lot. Just tell me where I go to get my mail. I'm expecting some."

"There's no letters for you yet," he said.

"Not letters," I said, "packages. Some clothes I had charged to Mr. Axeler personally but shipped direct to me."

Herb stared at me. "Charged to Mr. Axeler personally?"

"That's right," I replied. "He sent me to a friend of his and told me to charge anything I needed and have it sent up."

Herb continued to stare. "And the man said he would?"

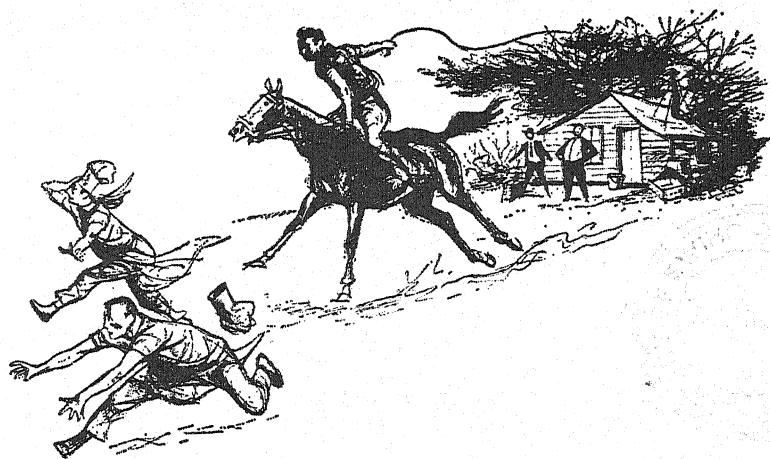
"No," I said, "the owner of the shop wasn't there, but the shop assistant said he would tell him."

Herb burst into laughter and flopped down on the ground beside me. "You're crazy," he said. "Nobody who knows Mr. Axeler would let him charge a packet of spearmint gum. Why, they won't trust him for a nickel round here. You've got about as much chance of seeing those clothes as I have of flying over the lake by waving my arms."

I looked at Herb. There was no question that what he had said was true: those clothes would never arrive. It was almost the cruellest disappointment of all. I was silent so long that Herb turned to me and said, "Listen, it's only clothes. You can go into town and buy the stuff. Just wait till he gets off that horse, then hit him over the head for some dough. Hey, lookit," he exclaimed, "over there." He leaped to his feet and pointed to a small building across the field. Two men, arms waving wildly, were running round it and looking over their shoulders as they ran. Herb squealed and jumped up and down. "You'll see the Mad Cossack and his horse in a minute now," he yelled.

"What is it?" I shouted back at him. "What's happening?"

"That's the bakehouse, and those poor jerks are two Hunkies he got up here as bakers. They took one look and decided to quit yesterday morning. He's been chasing 'em back inside that iron maiden with a whip ever since. Yep, here he comes!"



With a wild Cossack yell, Mr. Axeler rounded the corner of the building on his horse. It was a large black animal and he rode it well. He was dressed in riding breeches and puttees and a glaring red shirt, his uniform for the summer. And sure enough, he carried a long black whip, which he used with extreme dexterity. At sight of him the two men fled round the corner of the building, arms still waving, only to come back into sight a moment later with Mr. Axeler close at their heels, snapping the whip around their feet. I watched, dumbfounded. He was obviously not trying to hit them, but only to frighten them back into the bakehouse. They all circled the building two or three times more, the two men running wildly in front of the horse, the whip slashing the ground all round them, until finally the poor creatures gave up and retreated inside the doorway where they stood shaking their fists.

Mr. Axeler now looked in our direction and galloped over. He reined the horse to a circus-like stop directly in front of me and smiled down. It was the same candid, forthright smile, a little more dazzling in fact now that he was seated on a horse. "Welcome!" he said. "Welcome to our Half Moon family." Before I could get a word out, he had reined the horse round again and was galloping off, calling back over his shoulder, "We'll talk, we'll talk. Lots to do first. Anything you need, just ask."

We watched in silence until he disappeared over the horizon.

"Yeah," said Herb sourly, breaking the silence, "anything you need, just ask. Now you see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered heavily, "now I see. Thanks for everything, Herb." We shook hands rather solemnly, and as he walked away I wondered ruefully if the theatre was really worth it!

SOME TEN DAYS later paint had been sprayed around, gravel spread and geraniums placed on the porch. It was Decoration Day week-end, and the summer of my discontent swung into full gear.

The first major catastrophe came with the very first show and I must admit that it was of my own making. I had chosen to go ahead with my uplift programme, despite the pathetically inadequate facilities of the social-hall stage, and for the big Decoration Day splash I elected to put on *The Emperor Jones* and play the leading role myself. This was pigheadedness of a very tall order since for actors I was limited to the six musicians in the camp's orchestra and the nurse, who was studying to be an opera singer.

Doggedly, I went ahead nevertheless, mainly I think as a just punishment for Mr. Axeler, for from the very beginning it was easily apparent how bad the play was going to be. But I still smarted over the slick way I had been hoodwinked, and for another thing my clothes problem, with the arrival of the first guests, had become painfully acute. I had caught Mr. Axeler unhorsed two or three times, but my pleading had got me exactly nowhere. It was not until the end of June that I was able to gouge twenty-five dollars out of him and finally buy that pair of white flannel trousers and a blue blazer with brass buttons. Meanwhile, it was necessary to come to terms and quickly with my lack of wearing apparel.

I solved the problem ingeniously enough, but to this very day I feel a flush of embarrassment when I think of how I did it. For five solid weeks I used the costumes in the camp wardrobe trunk and pretended that my comic appearance was part of a social director's job of "making fun" for the customers.

"I'm going to come in in a different costume for each meal," I told the musicians, "and whatever I wear I want the trumpet and the sax to give me an appropriate fanfare before I appear."

They looked at me as though I had taken sudden leave of my wits. This was not unusual. They had not taken kindly to the idea of being impressed into *The Emperor Jones* as blacked-up natives. When it was almost lunchtime I got into the bedraggled uniform of a Confederate general and grimly glued on a moustache. Then, making sure that the last guest had entered the dining-room, I walked to the porch of the main building.

The two musicians stood waiting inside the doorway. "All right," I said, "go on in and play." They preceded me into the dining-room, blasting into the opening bars of "Dixie," and I could see every head turn. I took a deep breath and stalked into the dining-room on the second chorus. "General Nuisance of the Deep South," I announced in a billowing Southern accent, "is up North here to see how you Dam-yankees socialize in the hot summer weather, and has been delegated by your social director to make the following announcements." I stopped and gave what I presumed sounded like a Rebel yell. The entire thunderstruck dining-room broke into delighted laughter and applause.

They greeted the announcements I made of the afternoon's events with more laughter and applause, and I finally sat down to eat lunch dripping wet and throbbing with embarrassment and rage. The rage was directed at Mr. Axeler, who was now moving among the tables and beamingly accepting compliments on how well the new social director "made fun." There could be no doubt that the guests liked it. When I finally had clothes of my own, Mr. Axeler had the gall to suggest I keep on with it.

That evening I appeared in the social hall as Tecumseh, an old Indian chief, and the following day at lunch, to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw," I walked in as Daniel Boone, coonskin cap and all. But the more they laughed and applauded, the more I loathed them, myself and my employer.

It was in this actively vengeful mood that I went through with the rehearsals of *The Emperor Jones*, though I never imagined the night-mare that performance was going to turn out to be. My appearances as Long John Silver and Abraham Lincoln during the preceding days had ill prepared the audience. They always expected a musical of some sort for the big Saturday-night show on Decoration Day week-end, and when I came on to the stage as the drunken, tragic emperor they took

it for granted that this was a skit satirizing my own comic get-ups, and they roared with laughter. When it slowly dawned upon them that this was a serious play, I could feel them settle back, angry and disappointed.

I had other things to worry about, however, than a disgruntled audience. That afternoon a mass of freezing air had settled over the countryside. The audience had arrived wrapped in sweaters, raincoats and blankets, and a biting wind whistled through the open social hall. I was all right during the first scene, when the emperor wears a uniform before he flees the palace to the jungle. But what would happen when I appeared in the second scene, naked except for a loincloth, and had to speak the recurrent line, "I'se meltin' wid de heat," I did not choose to think about.

Sure enough, at my first cry of "I'se meltin' wid de heat," an irrepressible giggle swept over the footlights. I quaked inwardly and waited for the worst to happen. The worst was not long in coming. When the skinny and easily recognizable musicians stepped out from behind the cardboard palm trees and stood there shivering, the entire social hall broke into a gale of uncontrollable laughter.

The musicians had so resented having to put on black make-up that they had applied it to themselves in streaks and patches. Moreover, the drummer, who had rather a large pot belly, had chosen not to apply the make-up to this portion of his anatomy at all, so a round white globe swung gently above his loincloth and howls of laughter greeted his every movement across the stage. When the tom-toms started, one of the musicians gave a terrible start, and his loincloth came unstuck. He made a tremendous grab and retrieved it just in the nick of time, but not before the audience had shrieked with glee. When this kind of laughter sweeps through an audience it is a sort of mass hysteria. They laughed at nothing and everything. They stamped their feet, banged on the chairs, whistled and finally began to beat time with the tom-toms, drowning me out altogether. I was beyond caring. I doggedly mouthed lines and kept thinking of standing under a hot shower to get warm again.

At the final moment of the play, when I lifted the revolver to my temple and shouted, "The silver bullet!" and the off-stage revolver did not go off, it mattered very little. I dropped down on to the stage anyway, dead in more ways than just play acting, and waited for the

curtains to close. To my amazement the closing was greeted with a tremendous salvo of applause. I had given them as good a time for the wrong reasons as if I had put on a regulation funny show. I took one half-hearted bow and marched off wearily, the still shivering musicians trailing silently after me.

What we did not know until we stood under the showers was that the end of *The Emperor Jones* was not yet. As we scrubbed and scrubbed, it became apparent that the body make-up I had found in the make-up box would not come off. We tried dousing ourselves with paraffin, but the stuff still clung to us in large black spots. It branded us, like the Scarlet Letter, for weeks.

Yet out of that *Emperor Jones* fiasco came one of the most rewarding relationships of my life. A paying guest of the Half Moon Country Club had wandered into one of the last rehearsals and had stood at the back for almost two hours quietly watching us. After the rehearsal ended he told me his name was Joe Hyman and offered to help with the lights and the curtain. We shook hands on it and walked down towards the lake together, neither one of us aware that at every critical moment of my life from that time on Joe Hyman would be at my side. He was a knit-wear manufacturer, a stage-struck businessman who hated business. For some reason, he believed in me immediately, and luckily for me he was a man of incorruptible honesty and steadfastness.

MY CHIEF CONCERN, now that the opening show was over, was for my father and brother. I suspected, however, that my hopes of bridging the gap between my shy, conventional brother and myself had grown slimmer the day I stood in the doorway of the dining-room dressed in that first ridiculous get-up. He had a tray full of dirty dishes in his hands when I made my appearance as a Confederate general—and for a moment I thought he was going to let the tray drop. Instead, he dashed out red-faced and indignant. From then on he avoided me as much as possible.

My father, on the other hand, turned out to be the surprise of the summer. From the night the canteen in the social hall opened and he stood behind the counter dispensing soft drinks, cigarettes and cigars, ten years seemed to drop from his shoulders and he became loquacious and merry, quickly establishing himself as a camp favourite. I had

grown used to seeing him sitting at the window at home, wrapped in an old grey sweater, lonely and withdrawn. Now he blossomed in a hundred enjoyable ways. There was something heart-warming as well as faintly comic in seeing him hurrying all over camp at a fast clip, happy in the newly discovered pleasure of being accepted for the sunny creature he really was.

BY THE END of July, camp-fire nights, dress-up nights, games nights, Saturday-night shows and guest parties all seemed to blur together in unending drudgery combined with bottled-up rage. I developed a deep and obsessive concern with money. I not only literally counted out every penny I spent, I grew incapable of spending the most trifling sum without experiencing a real and sharp stab of pain at the pit of my stomach. For six weeks, finally, I drew not one penny of my salary except the ten dollars I sent to my mother every Monday morning to pay for her room and board. As the season rounded into August, the guests came in ever-increasing numbers, and I began to mark off the days on my calendar. The last two weeks of camp rushed headlong into the big, final Labour Day week-end.

On Labour Day night, when the curtains closed on the last show of the season, I went wearily to the Bastille and began to pack. There was an early-morning train out, and what I now wanted more than anything else in the world was to collect my salary from Mr. Axeler and get my father, my brother and myself on that train. I dropped off to sleep finally, indulging myself in a fantasy that consisted of returning to New York, forming a Union of Social Directors, and black-listing Mr. Axeler and the Half Moon Country Club right off the summer-camp circuit for ever.

How absurd it was to dream of triumphing over Mr. Axeler was exquisitely demonstrated the next morning. I was immediately uneasy when I stepped out of the Bastille. For the first time, the horse and rider were nowhere on the landscape. My disquiet was heightened by an unusual activity which could be heard going on in the office behind closed doors. Finally the door opened slightly and Herb Morris emerged, white-faced and shaken. "There's going to be a meeting of all the employees in the dining-room at eleven o'clock," he whispered.

"What for?" I whispered back. "What's happening?"

"Mr. Axeler took the late train out of here for New York last night," he replied. "He left a letter. His partners got it this morning. Nobody's going to get paid, not a cent. They're in there now trying to scare up enough money between them to get us home somehow. Even the waiters' pool of tips is gone."

I stared at him stupidly, then I walked outside and wandered off into a field. I could not seem to think clearly of what had to be faced; nor could I bear to find my father and brother and break the news to them. I reflected bitterly that I should have known enough to draw my full salary week by week.

At eleven o'clock I joined the employees' meeting in the dining-room. We were all to be given notes for our salary, which were to be paid in full as soon as possible—a grandiose promise that fooled nobody; and the waiters' pool of tips was to be figured on the basis of other years' pools. As far as I could make out, Mr. Axeler had not actually absconded with any money, but had simply not kept his partners informed as to the true state of the camp's income and outgo. And since his partners had been no more successful in catching him unhorsed than the rest of us, he had smiled his way through the summer and only dismounted long enough to write them the letter they had found in the safe this morning.

We lined up glumly in front of the table while a sad-faced partner doled out a sum to each of us for train fare that would at least take us out of Vermont. I stood beside my father and brother in the line. My father remained unruffled and philosophical, his chief regret (or so it seemed) being only that this blissful summer was at an end. He seemed unaware that our finances had at last hit rock bottom. My brother was silent as usual, but his silence conveyed understanding, not blame, and his wordless sympathy formed the first slim bond that had ever existed between us. As my father burred on, our eyes occasionally met in an unspoken agreement to share this family crisis together and say nothing. I began to feel better in spite of myself—and my spirits lifted still further when it turned out that after buying my father a ticket straight through to New York, there would still be enough money left to get my brother and myself as far as Albany. With a little luck on the road we might be able to hitch-hike the rest of the way in little more than a day and a night.

IT WAS NOT, as it turned out, either a hard or an unpleasant journey. Had we had enough money to buy food, it would actually have been quite enjoyable and even as it was we arrived back in the Bronx not one bit the worse for our fast. My mother's furnished room, now occupied by my father as well, was luckily paid for until the beginning of the following week, and the landlady had agreed that my brother and I could sleep on her living-room sofa for a night or two; she would also trust us for meals. But it was plain that this arrangement, good-willed as it was, could not last. We were actually homeless and, except for the remnants of the last ten dollars I had sent my mother, penniless as well.

Again my mother surprised me by remaining dry-eyed and clear-minded. She had already written down a list of relatives, and beside each name she had set down a sum she thought we might be able to borrow. I quickly added up the figures. It was woefully inadequate. As closely as I could figure it, we needed not less than two hundred dollars to see our furniture out of storage, to pay a month's rent on a new apartment, and to live on until I could get my little-theatre work started. The sum loomed gigantic.

I sat silent for a long time. I knew they were all waiting for me to come to some sort of decision, but I could not. I was dissolved in a kind of wild panic. I felt our family, small as it was, disintegrating before my eyes. I got up from that table and walked out of the kitchen and out of the house. I walked the three blocks to where we used to live and stared up at the fourth-floor windows. Even now, with a few coins from my mother's purse jingling in my pocket—all the money we possessed in the world—it was a victory of sorts to be out of that hated apartment.

I felt decidedly better for having looked at it. I had only to envisage walking up those discoloured steps into the dirty hallway to know that being homeless was not the worst of all possible evils. The real evil was to live on in the symbol of defeat and not to fight one's way out. Suddenly I was able to think clearly again. I faced the blunt fact that my scheme of social directing in summer and little theatres in winter might not work. If that was true, the alternative would be a regular job in the workaday world. But to turn back now, without a struggle, was to give up more than just the idea of becoming a playwright—it was to

relinquish as well the vision of a way of life. I was not prepared to give up my chance at that vision. Somewhere in this city must be someone who could lend me two hundred dollars.

I thought at once of the richest person I knew—Mrs. Henry B. Harris. She liked me and she was a woman given to impulsive generosity. I walked quickly to the candy shop at the corner and telephoned her. Mrs. Harris was out of the city.

I thought briefly of Mr. Pitou, but I had cost him dearly enough already. Then the name of another who had evinced a belief in my ability flashed into mind—Joe Hyman. He had come back to camp once more during the summer, and again he had worked the lights and curtain, and we had talked at length about the theatre. It was stretching our slim summer acquaintance a good deal to call it a friendship, but I had gathered that his knit-wear business was the second largest in the city, and that was enough for me. I gave his number to the operator in an unusually husky voice. The words “last chance” seemed to grow on the glass door of the telephone booth as I waited.

When Joe Hyman came to the phone, his voice was warm and welcoming. He would be in the office all afternoon, he said, and he would be glad to see me. I hung up the receiver and bought myself a cherry soda to steady my nerves.

On the subway ride down-town I thought of something he had said once. I reminded him of it as I sat in his office, although not at all in the fine, dignified way that I had intended. Anyone who has ever sat at a desk opposite another man and asked him for money knows what an unhappy business it is. I struggled through a few minutes of chatter, and then I was startled to hear myself speaking in a belligerent tone: “You told me this summer you wanted to sell your share in the business and produce plays. Well, I’m going to write plays, and if you’ll lend me two hundred you can produce them. This is a good chance for you.” I stopped, as astonished as though someone else had been speaking. What in the world had prevented me from telling him simply and truthfully that I was dead broke and that without his help I might have to give up the idea of playwriting entirely?

I stared miserably across the desk at him. He had listened to me quite straight-faced, but now he smiled. “All right,” he said, “we’re partners. Do you want it in cash or by cheque?”

"Cash," I replied quietly, too surprised to add a "thank you." He reached into his wallet and counted out two hundred dollars.

"You go ahead and write 'em," he said, handing me the money, "and maybe I *will* do just that . . . sell this business and produce plays. Not right away, perhaps, but some day."

I RODE the subway back, with my hand clutched tightly round the money in my trouser-pocket. It was more money than I had ever seen, more money than I think my parents had ever seen, when I tossed it on the bed in my mother's room.

In less than an hour we had arranged to move into an apartment that my mother had found a week earlier. At eight the next morning we were on our way. It was something to know we would be eating a meal in a kitchen of our own by evening. Our new home was in Brooklyn, well over an hour's subway ride from Times Square, and its three tiny rooms were on the ground floor, but we could afford the rent without taking in boarders. The apartment was in a brand-new building that had a little forecourt with trees and a tiny fountain.

I paid the deposit to the superintendent, and as the moving van arrived in front of the building I announced I was going to explore the neighbourhood while our belongings were being moved in. I walked away, stopping after a block or so at a candy and stationery shop to buy some pads of yellow paper, a supply of candy and a box of cheese crackers. We were only one station from Coney Island, and I knew there was another beach close by. I headed for it.

It was a sweet, mild September morning but there was not a soul to be seen upon the stretch of sand that edged the bay. It would be an excellent place to work, and the impulse to get to work was strong. Time presses terribly at twenty.

I looked across the bay to Manhattan, and it seemed to me that on this day I had grasped one of the theatre's deepest secrets. Survival. I knew that I would survive now, that I would get on with the business of writing plays. To be concerned about whether any of those plays would ever see a Broadway production seemed ungrateful. Whatever guardian angel watched benignly over me had produced Joe Hyman, some pads of yellow paper, and an empty, sunny beach; and I could ask for no further guarantees.

I made a mound of sand to lean against, waggled my backside into it for a comfortable seat, and settled down to write a play.

7

FOUR YEARS LATER, almost to the exact day and at almost the identical spot on the beach where I had sat four years earlier, I sat again, my pockets stuffed with a supply of candy, a pad of yellow paper again on my knees.

I had just returned from another season of social directing, but this time as social director of the Flagler Hotel, the Fontainebleau of the Catskills. In those four years I had gone, like Kansas City, about as far as I could go. I was now the most highly paid, the most eagerly sought-after social director of the Borscht Circuit.

I had come a long way indeed, I thought sardonically, but not a long enough way to be any farther than this beach come each new September. I was now in my sixth summer of social directing, my sixth winter of little-theatre work, and each winter I had faithfully, and with agonizing effort, completed a play. All six of them had been refused by the best managements on Broadway and reposed out of sight on an unused shelf in the kitchen. The seventh awaited only the pencil I held in my hand to start taking shape on the yellow pad on my knee. I gazed across the bay to Manhattan, as I had done at the start of each of these Septembers, but not quite as hopefully. In my pocket reposed a letter of rejection from Richard J. Madden, of the American Play Company, that frankly puzzled me. *Since by far the best part of the plays you have sent us have been the comedic moments*, he had written, *why not try writing a comedy? I am inclined to believe very strongly that you could turn out a good one.*

It was pure blockheadedness not to gravely estimate the truth of his words, though I was a full-blown snob so far as the popular comedies of the day were concerned. If I could bring myself to attempt a comedy it could be only in the satiric tradition of a master like George S. Kaufman, and I was neither so brave nor so innocent as to consider that an easy undertaking. But again my predilection for omens and portents played a decisive part. This would be my seventh play, and seven was a lucky number. I decided to try a comedy.



A little grumpily I removed the mantle of tragedy from my shoulders and scribbled a title across the blank yellow pad. The title was *Once in a Lifetime*, and it would fit a slight comedic idea I had in the back of my head. Staring down at it, I began to block out in my mind the opening scenes of a play about Hollywood. I had, of course, never been anywhere near Hollywood, but this did not stop me from imagining the upheaval that might be happening there now with the sudden advent of talking pictures.

A weekly copy of *Variety*, that astute and all-knowing theatrical journal, was the full extent of the research I did on *Once in a Lifetime*, and I could not have done better. *Variety* viewed Hollywood with a shrewd and shifty eye, and I read every word.

To my alarmed surprise, the comedy was finished in something under three weeks, and I had had a very good time writing it—a good enough time to make me thoroughly suspicious of it. I had no idea whether it was very good or no good at all. There was only one way to find out and that was to see whether an audience laughed at it. I had never done such a thing before, but I decided suddenly to call off that evening's rehearsal with one of my little-theatre groups, a very mature and almost professional one, and read *Once in a Lifetime* to them instead.

They were a quick and knowing audience. Long before I came to the final curtain, I was completely aware that I had written a very funny

first act, a somewhat commonplace second act and a quite flat third act. There was also no question that, in spite of its obvious lacks, the play had a wonderful surging vitality, and that I could make an audience laugh.

We were all excited when I finished and, in the midst of the shouting discussion that followed, one of the group, who knew Jed Harris's sister, went to the phone and arranged a meeting for me the next day with that celebrated producer. His was a name to conjure with in the theatre of the twenties, and every aspiring playwright's prayer in those days probably went along exactly the same lines: "Please, God, let Jed Harris do my play!"

I rode home that night in a foolish and happy daze, trying to recall the pictures I had seen of him. It was a face that leaped back into one's memory: the gaunt features, the clean-shaven cheeks thinly ringed by a dark shadow of beard, and the unforgettable hooded eyes. Whatever play Harris turned his hand to was catapulted into immediate success, and his vagaries, his flaring tempers, his incisive way with a script were already a legend.

Nothing, however, could have prepared me for the tongue-tied shock of my visit to Harris. Like everything else about him, it was unexpected, perverse, and calculated to disconcert.

When I arrived eagerly at his hotel the next afternoon for my two-o'clock appointment, word came down that I was to wait. I waited. I sat in that elegant, walnut-panelled lobby until, at twenty minutes past five, I was told by the clerk that Mr. Harris wanted me to leave the manuscript at the desk and come back the next day. This I did, expecting him to have read the play overnight. Again I waited. It was only when I presented myself for the third and—I had bitterly decided—the last time that I was told to go up to his suite.

The upper regions of the Madison Hotel were thickly carpeted and elegantly empty. I walked down the silent corridor to the half-open door marked 810-12 and pressed the bell. After a moment, a muted voice called, "Come in; come in." I pushed the door open and walked into a peculiarly lifeless living-room. While I stood uncertainly, the voice, this time much clearer, and seeming to come from the bedroom, again called, "Come in!"

I crossed the living-room and walked into the bedroom. Its famous

occupant was nowhere to be seen but the two ash-trays on the bedside table were filled with half-smoked cigarettes and the table itself was piled high with play scripts. The voice called out again, "Come in; come in," this time unmistakably issuing from the bathroom.

The bathroom door was standing open. I moved towards it, a little mystified at the strange ways of the celebrated, and as I reached the threshold I stopped dead. Mr. Harris was in front of the washbasin and mirror, stark naked. He was shaving and he addressed my image in the mirror, with the easy politeness of two people greeting each other in a drawing-room.

"Good morning," he said. "I'm sorry I couldn't see you until now. I read your play last night and I liked a great deal of it."

I have no recollection of what I said to this, or even if I made any reply at all. I was suffused with embarrassment. But as far as Mr. Harris was concerned, he might have been receiving Lord Chesterfield himself for an early-morning call. He was courteous, almost excessively so, and extremely talkative. Unfortunately, I did not hear a great deal he said. I looked at the ceiling and at the floor. A word or two penetrated, but that was all.

Talking all the while, Mr. Harris passed me in the doorway, and began to dress himself in the bedroom. As he stood in his underwear at last, I began to hear what he was saying—and I regretted every word I had missed, for his criticism of *Once in a Lifetime* was sharp and penetrating. As his nimble tongue raced on, I was too fascinated by his words to break in with the burning question: Did he like the play well enough to do it? Before I was quite aware of what was happening, his clothes were on, his coat was over his arm and he was walking out of the suite towards the lift.

"Are you going down-town?" he asked as he pressed the lift button. I nodded. "Good," he said, "you can drop me."

He talked in the lift, walking through the lobby, and inside the taxicab into which he leaped as we left the hotel, and he was talking still when we came to a stop in front of the Morosco Theatre. He called out a good-bye over his shoulder and I watched him disappear down the stage alleyway, a little stunned. Not until the driver called back, "Where to, buddy?" did it occur to me that Mr. Harris had left me to pay for the cab.

I walked towards my more native habitat, the subway, trying to sort out in my mind exactly what this astonishing interview had meant in terms of *Once in a Lifetime*. I could fix on nothing which expressed his outright desire to produce the play, nor on anything which showed a complete lack of interest in it. I was at a loss as to what to do next, and in the end I did nothing.

Meanwhile I had given a copy of the play to a friend to read, and two weeks later, still having heard nothing from Jed Harris, I was greatly surprised to hear that another distinguished producer, also named Harris—Sam Harris—had read the play and I was to call on his general manager, Max Siegel. What had happened was that my friend, without my knowledge, had turned the play over to an influential agent, Miss Frieda Fishbein, who had submitted it to the Harris office. A few days later I found myself on my way there to keep an appointment with Max Siegel.

Sam Harris's office was exactly what a theatrical producer's office should be. Most of the furniture had quite obviously been reclaimed from various Broadway failures. An Italian Renaissance chair stood behind a French Empire desk, early American benches served as end tables, and the sofa and easy chairs had wildly contrasting coverings; but the over-all effect was somehow wonderfully theatrical and cosy.

Max Siegel was a smiling and cosy fellow. He was congratulatory about the play, and explained that after reading it he had sent it off to Sam Harris, who was visiting Irving Berlin in Hollywood. He had a telegram from Mr. Harris which he read to me: "*Like play. Ask the young author if he would be willing to make a musical of it with Irving Berlin.*"

I was silent for a moment, then I rose from my seat and spoke. When I think of the conceit, the pomposity of the words I used, I blush a little still. "I do not write musical comedies, Mr. Siegel," I said, "I'm a playwright. I write plays—*only* plays." I turned stiffly towards the door.

Siegel laughed—and his laugh saved the day. "You don't have to write musical comedies if you don't want to," he said. "Let me send Mr. Harris another telegram." He picked up a pencil and wrote on a piece of paper. "How's this?" he asked. "*Young author says he is playwright and does not write musical comedies. Are you interested in play as play? Does that say it plainly enough?*"

"Yes," I replied, and added boldly, "But another producer is interested in the play, so he'd better make up his mind."

Max Siegel chuckled. "Mr Harris is a quick decider. You may have an answer tomorrow morning." He held out his hand. "It's interesting to meet someone who turns down Sam Harris and Irving Berlin in the same breath," he said. "And I happen to think you're right."

It was my turn now to grin. I shook hands with Max Siegel and marched out of the office, trailing behind me a cloud of artistic integrity that lasted all the way into the street outside.

SIEGEL CALLED me the next morning. "I have a telegram from Sam Harris: *Tell young author I will produce his play if George Kaufman likes it and agrees to collaborate. Is he willing to collaborate with Kaufman? Am sending play air mail to Kaufman.*"

A moment was all that I needed to make up my mind. "Tell him yes," I said, almost before he had finished reading. "When will I know whether Mr. Kaufman likes it or not?"

"He usually reads a play the day he gets it," replied Siegel. "I should think you'd have an answer by Thursday." He laughed. "Don't write any musical comedies in the meantime!"

The more I thought of it, after he clicked off, the more certain I became that a chance to work in collaboration with George Kaufman would be of greater value to me than a production as sole author by Jed Harris or anyone else. It seemed imperative that I acquaint Harris with this fact as soon as possible, for he must still believe he held the right to produce the play if he chose to do so. Nevertheless, I let two full days go by before I could summon up enough courage to put through a call to him.

When, stumbly, I blurted out my story, there was nothing but silence from the other end of the phone. At last he spoke, his voice as silken as ever. "I think you're doing exactly the right thing," he said. There was another little silence and then the voice came softly again. "Do you know George Kaufman?"

"No," I replied.

"Has he read the play yet, do you know?" he inquired.

"He may be reading it today," I answered. "That's why I wanted to call you. And I want to thank you, Mr. Harris, for being so——"

"Listen," the voice cut in, "here is George Kaufman's telephone number. Call him right away and tell him Jed Harris says this is just the kind of play he ought to do. Good-bye."

And before I could utter a word, there was a click at the other end of the line. I sat staring at the telephone, wondering anew at the unpredictability of Jed Harris. I would drop him a note of thanks, I decided, after I had talked to George Kaufman.

The number Harris gave me had barely buzzed when a voice said, "Yes?" Not "Hello"; just "Yes."

"May I speak to Mr. Kaufman, please?" I said.

"This is he," said the voice bluntly.

"Oh," I said and paused, overcome with timidity.

"Yes?" said the voice again, this time quite testily.

"My name is Moss Hart," I said, plunging. "You don't know me, but Sam Harris is sending you a play of mine to read."

"I received it this morning," said George Kaufman. "I am reading it tonight."

"Oh," I said again. I gulped and continued: "Well, Jed Harris has read it and he asked me to give you a message. He said to tell you that this is just the kind of play you ought to do."

Even as I spoke the words I was dimly conscious of their peculiar ring. After a brief moment I realized no reply had come through the wire, and I thought we had been disconnected.

"Hello. . . . Hello." I said into the mouthpiece two or three times. But we had not been disconnected. George Kaufman's voice was glacial when he spoke again. "I would not be interested in anything that Jed Harris was interested in," he said and hung up.

I stared stupidly at the telephone in complete dismay.

NOT UNTIL long afterwards did I learn that Kaufman and Jed Harris were at that moment at the climax of a corrosive theatrical quarrel. That seemingly innocent message was designed to produce exactly the deplorable result that it had. If Jed Harris intended to punish me for withdrawing the play, he had deftly accomplished his purpose in the most stinging and hurtful way.

After a night of real wretchedness I was asleep when the telephone rang the next morning. I got out of bed and answered it.

"Is this the young author?" Max Siegel's voice was cheerful.

"Yes," I answered, shaking a little with excitement.

"Can you meet George Kaufman here at three o'clock?"

"You mean he read it?" I asked incredulously.

"Certainly he read it," said Max Siegel. "He likes it very much. You'll be here at three o'clock then?"

"Yes," I managed to reply. "Three o'clock."

I hung up, and startled my mother, who had just come into the room, by throwing my arms round her and kissing her soundly.

"We're going to be rich," I said gleefully. She smiled, pleased at my good spirits, but refrained from asking if they were once again based upon my "homework." She had been through six years of varying degrees of enthusiasm every time I finished a play, and I have no doubt she had heard a version of the same speech before.

"I'm going to work with George Kaufman, *that's* the difference *this* time," I said. "George S. Kaufman," I repeated, rolling out the name luxuriously.

She was unaware of who George Kaufman was but she smiled again, encouragingly. "That's very nice," she said. It was the tone of voice she reserved, I remembered, for such moments as when I would rush to show her a new stamp in my stamp-collecting days. "But if you're going to bring that Mr. Kaufman home to work with you," she said politely, "I hope you won't do it until after next week. We're having the painters."

"I'll explain that to him," I said.

AT THREE O'CLOCK I walked up the stairs of the Music Box Theatre to the mezzanine and knocked on the door of Sam Harris's office. Max Siegel, smiling as usual, stood in the doorway, and behind him I caught my first glimpse of George Kaufman, slumped down in one of the large arm-chairs. The bushy hair brushed straight up, the tortoise-shell glasses placed low on the rather large nose, the quick, darting eyes searching incisively over the rims, the sensuous mouth set at a humorous tilt in the long angular face—each single feature was a caricaturist's delight. It was not a handsome face but it was an immensely attractive one.

Though it was rather a mild October day, he sat in the chair in his

overcoat, and round his neck was wrapped a long blue woollen scarf. His legs were entwined one under the other, and one arm was stretched round the back of his neck to the opposite side of his head where it was busily engaged in scratching his ear.

"This is the young author, George," said Max Siegel, ushering me to the centre of the room.

"Hi," said Mr. Kaufman wearily. With infinite lassitude he lifted in greeting one finger of his disengaged hand.

"Sit down," said Max Siegel, and smiled reassuringly at me. "You want me to do the talking, George?" Again the one finger rose slowly in assent. "Mr. Kaufman has suggested some terms for a division of the royalties," said Max Siegel. "Would you prefer to go over them with your agent?" He handed me a typewritten slip. "I think you'll find they're very generous."

"I'm sure there will be no difficulty," I said. I put the slip of paper in my pocket without looking at it. My eyes were still riveted on the unmoving figure in the arm-chair. A long-drawn-out and mournful sigh came from the depths of the chair, followed by a slight but unmistakable belch.

"When can we have a working session?" Mr. Kaufman said.

"Whenever you want to," I answered eagerly. "Right away."

"Would eleven tomorrow be all right?" he asked tiredly.

"Fine," I replied.

"My house," he said. "One fifty-eight East Sixty-third Street." One arm was going round the back of his neck again to scratch his ear.

Max Siegel winked at me and addressed the arm-chair. "Is that all you want of the young author now, George?" he said.

"That's all," came the answer, "except a second act."

I cleared my throat and took a deep breath. I felt the moment for a graceful little speech had arrived. I rose from the sofa and stood in front of the arm-chair. "Mr. Kaufman," I said, "I would like you to know how very much it means to me to . . ." and that was all I said. To my horror, the legs unwound themselves and the figure in the chair leaped up and out of it in one astonishing movement, like a large bird frightened out of its solitude in the marshes. With a rapidity I would not have believed possible he was across the room, out of the door and flying down the stairs, the blue scarf whipping out behind him.

I stared dazedly after the retreating figure. "What have I done?" I stammered. "What did I do?"

Max Siegel was shaking with laughter. "You haven't done anything," he answered. "I should have warned you. Mr. Kaufman hates any kind of sentimentality—can't stand it!" He started to laugh again. "Did you actually prepare a speech of thanks?" I nodded sheepishly.

"Well, no great harm done." He handed me a cheque. "That's five hundred dollars for your advance royalty. Congratulations." He held out his hand and smiled. "If you want to, you can make the speech to me so it won't be a total loss."

I smiled back and shook my head. We shook hands warmly and I walked out into the bright October afternoon, a shining afternoon that held a quality of incontinent pleasure I can still recall as vividly as though it were yesterday. Times Square was lighting up for the evening just before I walked down the subway steps to go home; the same subway steps, I reminded myself, that I had darted up to have my first look at Broadway long, long ago. I looked back at the lighted canyon, and the knowledge that I was going to be part of it at last brought me perilously close to that wonderful mixture of emotions that makes one want to laugh and to cry at the same time.

I was wise to have enjoyed that lingering look, for when I stood in the doorway and announced in ringing tones that I had sold the play my family received the news with infuriating calm. Even the cheque, which I placed in the centre of the dining-room table to be admired, was viewed with detachment and evident distrust. "I suppose you know what you're doing, taking all that money," my mother said warily, "but I wouldn't touch it until you've worked with this Mr. Kaufman a while—in case he asks you to give it back."

THE NEXT MORNING at five minutes to eleven, I rang the bell of 158 East 63rd Street. The brownstone house seemed disappointingly modest for a famous playwright, but the uniformed maid who opened the door was a reassuring sight. More like it, I thought. I walked in and glanced down the hall at a dining-room leading out into a little garden. There was a bowl of flowers on the polished table. Just right, I told myself. "Mr. Kaufman is waiting for you," said the maid. "The top floor. Just go right up."

When I reached the third-floor landing, Mr. Kaufman stood awaiting me in the doorway of his study. This room was a great blow. It was a small, rather dark room, furnished sparsely with a studio couch, a typewriter desk and one easy chair. Nor was there any hint that it was in any way concerned with the theatre.

Mr. Kaufman greeted me; that is to say, one finger was wearily lifted and his voice managed a tired "Hi."

I looked at him, eager and alert. With a large sigh, he turned his eye towards a mound of sharpened pencils on the desk, found two whose points were not to his liking, and ground them in a pencil sharpener. In the process of doing so, he discovered some pieces of lint on the carpet and these he carefully picked up, after which he patted a pile of typewriter paper on the desk until all its edges were perfectly aligned. His eyes darted dolefully round the room and finally came to rest on the chair in which I sat.

"Er . . ." he said, and began to pace rapidly up and down the room. The word "Er" followed by a rapid pacing I was to come to recognize as the actual start of a working session: a signal that pencil-sharpening, lint-picking time was over. During all the time we were engaged on *Once in a Lifetime*, he never once addressed me by any other name but "Er." I waited attentively until Mr. Kaufman stopped his pacing and stood looking down at me. "The trouble begins in the third scene of the first act," he said. "It's messy and goes off in the wrong direction. Suppose we start there."

I nodded, trying to look knowing; but this, like the workshop of the master, was a blow. I had been looking forward eagerly to that first talk on play-writing by the celebrated Mr. Kaufman; but this flat, unvarnished statement seemed to be all I was going to get. Mr. Kaufman was already moving past me to the bathroom, where he meticulously washed his hands. It was something he invariably did before he began the day's work, and I was struck by the fact that his hands were what one imagines the hands of a great surgeon to be. As he came back and sat down at the desk I had the inescapable impression that the sharp pencil held poised over the manuscript in those long tensile fingers was a scalpel.

The pencil suddenly darted down on to the paper, crossing out a line here and there, making a large X through a solid speech, fusing two

long sentences into one short one. The operation was repeated with lightning-like precision on the next page and the next, until the end of the scene. Then he picked up the manuscript from the desk and brought it over to me.

"Just cutting away the underbrush," he said. "See what you think." I took the manuscript and read with astonishment. The economy and clarity with which everything necessary was now said gave the scene a new urgency. I could hardly believe I had been so downright verbose. I looked up and stared admiringly at the waiting figure by the desk.

"It's just wonderful now," I said. "The scene really works now, doesn't it?"

Mr. Kaufman looked at me quizzically over the rims of his glasses before he spoke again. "No, it doesn't work at all," he said gently. "I thought the cuts would show you why it *wouldn't* work." He sighed and scratched his ear. "Perhaps the trouble starts earlier than I thought."

He took the play from my lap and placed it on the desk again. "All right. Page One—Scene One." He picked up a pencil and I watched fascinated and awe-struck as it swooped down on page after page.

8

*I*F IT IS possible for a book of this sort to have a hero, then that hero is George S. Kaufman. Such success as I have had in the theatre is due in large part to him. It is one thing to have an undisciplined flair for play-writing. It is quite another to apply this gift with explicitness, precision and form. All of this and a great deal more I learned from George Kaufman. And if it is true that no more eager disciple ever sat at the feet of a teacher, it is equally true that no disciple was ever treated with more infinite patience and understanding.

The debt I owe is a large one, for he was not at heart a patient man. In particular, easy admiration distressed him; any display of emotion filled him with dismay; the aroma of a cigar physically sickened him. I was guilty of all three of these things, and he was too shy or possibly too fearful of hurting my feelings to mention his distress to me. Day after day I filled the room with clouds of cigar smoke, admired everything he did, and was unable to forbear each evening before I left the making of a little speech of thanks.



I construed his odd behaviour at these times as merely one of the eccentricities of celebrated people. I would cheerfully light a cigar without pausing to wonder why Mr. Kaufman was retreating with something akin to terror to the open window. Nor could I understand why, after I fulsomely admired a new line of his, he would scratch his ear until I thought it would drop off, and stare at me malignantly over the top of his glasses.

I suppose his worst moment came at my leave-taking. Mr. Kaufman spent a good deal of his time, particularly in the late afternoons, stretched out full length on the floor, and it was usually at one of these unwary moments, when he was at his lowest ebb, that I would stand over him and deliver my eulogy on the day's work. Something like a small moan, which I misinterpreted as agreement, would escape from his lips. Delighted with my eloquence, I would light a new cigar, puff a last fresh aromatic cloud of smoke into his face, and cheerfully take my leave.

But if I was torturing Mr. Kaufman all unknowingly, the score was not exactly one-sided. The cause of my own agony was simple enough. Mr. Kaufman cared very little about food. He had his breakfast at ten o'clock in the morning, and work was enough to nourish him thereafter until evening; his energy, unlike my own, seemed to be attached not to his stomach but to his brain. True, tea would be brought in every afternoon at four o'clock. Six small cakes, no more and no less, and on gala occasions two slices of chocolate cake would lie on a plate before my hunger-glazed eyes.

Mr. Kaufman was always politely insistent that I help myself first, and since I was only too aware that he never took more than one little cake, which he absent-mindedly nibbled at, I slavishly followed his example for fear of being thought ill-mannered or unused to high life—until one day, maddened by hunger, I gobbled up every single little cake and the two slices of chocolate cake while he was in the bathroom washing his hands. Whether it was the mutely empty plate or my guilt-ridden and embarrassed face I do not know; but from that day onward little sandwiches began to appear, and teatime was moved up an hour earlier.

Meanwhile, in spite of our separate and unwitting mortifications, work proceeded with a gruelling regularity and an unswerving disregard of endurance, health or personal life that left me at first flabbergasted and then chastened and awe-struck at his dedication. This eminently successful man laboured each day quite as though this were *his* first play, not mine; his great chance to make his mark as a Broadway playwright, not my own.

In awe of him though I was, it never occurred to me not to disagree when I thought he was wrong; it simply never entered my mind to be timorous with him. I was all the more amazed to discover later that this kindly man could instantly disquiet the most formidable men by his mere presence. Headwaiters cowered and the wits of the town watched their tongues as he loomed up in a doorway, the eyes over those tortoise-shell rims seeming to examine the room for a sign of the inept, the fake or the pompous. He had a tart and ready wit and the courage to use it to puncture pretence or bombast, for, unlike most of us, he was not driven by a necessity to be liked. He adhered strictly to his own standards and they were stern ones. The result was that people

took pains to win his approval on any terms that he chose to make.

I came to know that the almost studied aloofness and indifference he presented to the world were the protective colouring of a diffident and modest man with a deep reservoir of emotion. Somehow or other, I managed from the very beginning to bypass both the façade and the cantankerous legend and immediately to fall into a warmhearted and gay relationship with him.

And then I met Beatrice Kaufman.

One morning, as I reached the third-floor landing at eleven o'clock, I was surprised to see Mr. Kaufman in conversation with a handsome woman whose luxuriant high pompadour was tinted a bluish grey. I was aware, of course, that other people moved about in the rooms below us, but I had never glimpsed anyone other than the maid. I must have stared in open-mouthed surprise, for they both turned towards me. Mr. Kaufman lifted the usual finger in greeting, and said, "Moss Hart—Beatrice Kaufman." We smiled at each other and I am a little loath to record that I at once took it for granted that Beatrice Kaufman was Mr. Kaufman's sister. In the Bronx or Brooklyn, introductions always took the form of, "This is my wife, Mrs. So-and-So," or simply, "My wife." I did not discover that Beatrice Kaufman was Mrs. Kaufman until a good deal later, so that the mildly confused look that came into Mr. Kaufman's eyes when I politely asked now and then about his sister is easily accounted for.

They picked up the threads of their interrupted conversation and I stood there uncertainly, admiring Beatrice Kaufman. She was not in the conventional sense a beautiful woman, but she had uncommon distinction, and a singular quality of her own that imbued even the smallest of daily undertakings with an enkindling gaiety and radiance. I had never been at such close quarters with anyone quite like her and I eavesdropped shamelessly as she recounted some tale of the New York world I had read about for so long in newspaper columns. I marvelled at the grace with which she sent Mr. Kaufman into willing and ready laughter—no small feat in itself—and I was fascinated and charmed by the vibrancy of the woman herself.

This is the kind of woman I will get to know, I thought, when I become a part of that world myself—and to my surprise she suddenly turned to me and said, "George is to stop work early today and come

down to tea. You're to come with him to make sure he gets there." She gave me a quick conspiratorial smile and then she was gone. I took it for granted she was having a family tea.

The sparkling light her presence engendered remained like an after-glow long after she had gone. It took me a while to settle down to work and then I was brighter than I had been for days. It came as something of a shock when Mr. Kaufman glanced at his watch and said, "It's quarter to five." He walked to the door and opened it. A babble of voices came up the stairway from the rooms below. It did not sound at all like a family tea party. "They're here," he sighed. "We'd better go down." As we walked down the stairs I realized with some little alarm that I was wearing my rehearsal clothes, an old blazer with brass buttons and a pair of faded brown flannel trousers. It was too late to think about that, however, for we were on the first-floor landing now and I was following Mr. Kaufman towards the drawing-room. I stopped dead at the threshold. The room was alive with people and I recognized every single one of them.

Everyone I had ever read about or hero-worshipped from afar seemed to be contained within my awe-struck gaze, from Ethel Barrymore and Harpo Marx to Helen Hayes and George Gershwin. I was seized with a kind of stage fright that made my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Only a stare from over those tortoise-shell rims made me move forward into the room.

"Alfred Lunt—Moss Hart," said Mr. Kaufman. Alfred Lunt held out his hand and I managed to shake it. "Leslie Howard—Moss Hart," and again I smiled and shook hands, not yet trusting my tongue to come unstuck. I stood grinning crazily, unable to get my upper lip down over my teeth.

A butler nudged my arm and said. "Tea or a drink, sir?" and I took a drink from the tray. I took a long swallow and looked round me delightedly. Maybe this time next year I'll be talking to everybody here, I thought contentedly. At the far end of the room someone began to play the piano, and I knew that it was probably George Gershwin. Beatrice Kaufman seated behind the tea table suddenly caught sight of me, smiled brightly and waved her hand. I smiled and waved back. Herbert Bayard Swope passed me and said with great heartiness, "Hello, there, how *are* you?" He had obviously mistaken me for

someone he knew; but I smiled back and said, "Fine, how are *you*?" Speech had returned. Why not talk to someone after all?

I looked round the room and to my surprise saw Alexander Woollcott, that most celebrated of critics and wits, sitting alone in a far corner calmly reading a book. It seemed to me an eccentric thing to be doing amid all the hubbub, but by the same token I reasoned he probably would not think it strange if I engaged him in conversation.

I made my way over to him and stood for a moment gathering my courage and my wits. I glanced sideways at the title of his book and saw that it was a new mystery that I had just finished reading myself. What better opening could I possibly have? I coughed discreetly to attract his attention. "You'll like that very much, Mr. Woollcott," I said, smiling engagingly down at him.

Mr. Woollcott withdrew his gaze slowly from the page, and his eyes, owlsh behind the thick spectacles, fixed themselves on mine. "How would *you* know?" he said.

The tone was so acid, the owlsh eyes gleamed so fiercely for a moment before they returned to the book, that I would have given anything to be able to vanish into thin air. But I could only stand rigid with embarrassment until my legs were able to move me away. There are moments so mortifying that one's inner sense of confusion and shame seems completely exposed. I began to tremble lest anyone else speak to me. Suddenly, I became painfully aware of how raw and unqualified I was to move among these people. As quickly as I could, I threaded my way through the jammed room and fled down the stairs.

The next morning, my determination to be part of Woollcott's world more firmly strengthened by my preposterous beginning, I was galvanized into a kind of working fury. Out of just such ignoble motives do plays and novels sometimes emerge.

I set such a furious pace in the following weeks that to my amazement and to Mr. Kaufman's as well, I think, the second act was completed and the structure of the third act was planned. To my further surprise, Mr. Kaufman called a halt. "I think a little breather is indicated before we plunge into the third act," he said. "We'll take tomorrow off." The very thought filled me with content; between my late little-theatre rehearsals and the long hours of work on the play I never had sufficient sleep. I planned simply to spend a day in bed. Mr.

Kaufman put an end to my dream. "Sam Harris is back from California and wants to meet you," he said. "He'd like you to come to the Music Box tomorrow at eleven. Is that all right?"

I nodded agreeably but seethed inwardly, and instantly made a solemn resolve: from the very first moment I could arrange to do so, I would never put a foot out of bed until noon. The solemn vows of our youth are fervently pledged but seldom kept. This one, however, I have had no trouble remaining faithful to. The Bay of Naples and the harbour at Rio de Janeiro were still there at one o'clock in the afternoon when I first laid eyes on them, and were even more beautiful, it seemed to me, for my being wide awake. So far as I know, nothing worth hearing is usually uttered at seven o'clock in the morning; and if it is, it will generally be repeated at a more reasonable hour for a larger, more wakeful audience.

I WAS NOT, therefore, in the best of moods to meet Sam Harris as I climbed the steps to his office the next morning, but he proved to be an irresistible human being. From the moment Max Siegel offered his usual introduction, "This is the young author, Mr. Harris," and Sam Harris came from behind the desk with his hand extended and said, "Hello, kid," I was his willing slave.

The extraordinary effect he produced was somehow made all the more striking by the first impression he gave of being a most ordinary little man of obviously little education. He was short and chunky, with a pushed-in face that was saved from downright ugliness by a pair of the brightest and kindest eyes I had ever seen, and a smile of such warmheartedness that words like "goodness" and "humanity" leaped foolishly into the mind.

We got along famously, once my enjoyment of him outran my shyness. "How are you two fellows getting along?" he asked. And when I replied, "I'm starving most of the time, but I think we've got a good second act," he roared with laughter. After that, I rattled on unrestrained, telling him all sorts of things about myself I had never told anyone else, until Max Siegel finally reappeared and reminded him of an appointment at the booking office.

Sam Harris rested a hand on my shoulder at the door. "We'll be seeing more of each other, kid," he said. "I hope a lot more. I think

you're going to write some interesting plays." He smiled that special smile of his and waved as I started down the steps. I waved and smiled back, jubilant and elated.

As we approached the end of the third act some of the formal quality of my collaboration with Mr. Kaufman began to thaw. One morning he said abruptly, "Let's have lunch out today. There seems to be a slight household crisis."

Lunch! I stared at him—we had never had lunch, as I understood lunch, in the four months I had been sitting starved in that chair. He must have misunderstood my look, for he added, "You'll be able to eat something by about one thirty or so, won't you?" I nodded slowly at him.

During lunch, I was somewhat startled to sense that he wanted to ask me a question but was embarrassed to do so. "What would you think," he finally said, "if I were to play the part of Lawrence Vail? We ought to begin to think about casting."

In spite of myself, I laughed. Scratch a playwright and you find a frustrated actor!

He joined in my laughter, then added hastily, "Of course I've never acted professionally, but I think I can do it and it would give that part authenticity."

"It's a *wonderful* idea," I said. I meant it. The part of Lawrence Vail was that of a famous Broadway playwright who is brought to Hollywood with frantic pleas for his immediate arrival, and then is kept waiting for six months without being able to find anybody who knows what he is there for. I knew the part would never be acted better than the way Mr. Kaufman had read it when he tried some of the scenes aloud.

He seemed inordinately pleased at my enthusiasm. So much so, that he seemed to want to hurry me through my cheese and apple-pie in order to get back to the typewriter. I was not to be pushed! He sat impatiently piling up little blocks of sugar all round the sugar bowl. "If you take larger bites," he finally remarked, "we could finish the third act in a week."

He was right to the exact day. A week later he typed "The curtain falls on Act Three" and quickly dashed into the bathroom, one of his

stratagems to escape my little speeches of thanks. He turned the wash-basin taps on full, and then, evidently suspecting a whopper this time, he turned on the bath taps as well, and began to undress. He smiled and lifted one finger in farewell, knowing it was impossible even for me to make a speech to a man who was stripping to get into a bath.

"The usual time tomorrow," he called out over the noise of the running water. "We'll have to let Sam Harris know what we'll want in the way of actors." And, a little too pleased with himself, he nudged the door with his foot and carefully closed it.

In the days that followed, the play was quickly cast. Then almost in a dream I was walking towards the Music Box for the first rehearsal. My excitement was such that I was, unhappily, the first person to arrive. The stage was empty except for the two stage managers, who were setting out chairs in a wide semicircle and placing a table in front of them. They stared at me in surprise, and I thought I saw a good-humoured wink pass between them, a testimony to my newness as an author. There is a rigid code of behaviour for the day of a first rehearsal.

Gradually, the bit players and minor principals began to arrive; then the leading players came on to the stage and took their places in the semicircle of chairs. Now, last of all, Sam Harris and Mr. Kaufman came down the aisle together and up on to the stage, Sam Harris greeting all the company with a word or a pat on the shoulder. Mr. Kaufman sat down at the table and motioned me to sit beside him. Harris sat down on the other side of Mr. Kaufman, with Siegel next to him. A stage manager called out, "All right, ladies and gentlemen—will you please be sure to use the fire buckets for your cigarettes? Thank you." He turned towards Mr. Kaufman. I found it difficult to breathe.

Mr. Kaufman opened the manuscript on the table before him and quietly pronounced what have always seemed to me to be the four most dramatic words in the English language: "Act One—Scene One." There was a fractional pause and then the first line of the play came from the semicircle of chairs.

I KNEW Mr. Kaufman was famed as a top-notch director, and though I heard nothing of what he said during the rehearsals—his infuriating method was to walk over to each actor and whisper in his ear—I quickly saw that the play was establishing an architecture of its own. On the

eighth day of rehearsals, the first complete run-through of the play was given for Sam Harris. We received neither enthusiasm nor misgivings from him and I was disturbed by his silence, which did not seem to disturb Mr. Kaufman at all. "You'll seldom hear praise from Sam Harris," he explained, "you'll only hear what he *doesn't* like. I don't think he was too displeased."

And with that I had to be content.

Once in a Lifetime was a large production. It called for six elaborate sets, and a quantity of rather bizarre props, including half a dozen live pigeons and two Russian wolfhounds, and neither the pigeons nor the wolfhounds seemed to respond as readily to Mr. Kaufman's whispers as the actors did.

Part of the panic I was feeling was due to the fact that, after the first easygoing week, the production of a play suddenly becomes a headlong rush to meet the deadline of opening night. It was all going too fast; there were a hundred things still undone. Before I could believe it was happening, I was dazedly packing my suit-case to go to Atlantic City for the dress rehearsals and the opening.

My own numbing anxiety was in no way helped by the fact that my family had made a complete turnabout. After their early suspicions, they were now firmly convinced that the rosiest of futures awaited only the rising of the curtain on *Once in a Lifetime*. My mother in particular was in a state of blissful certainty. For some years now she had been unable to explain to her friends exactly what it was her elder son did for a living. My summers were not too difficult to explain, though nothing to be proud of, measured against sons who were studying dentistry or the law; but the work I did in the wintertime completely defied understanding. She had maintained for a while that I gave "speech" lessons in the evenings; but she had, I knew, always refrained from any mention of my "homework." Now suddenly she could point to it with pride. *Once in a Lifetime* was booked to play a week in Atlantic City and a week in Brighton Beach, which was not far from where we lived. The neighbourhood was already well plastered with posters announcing its coming, and when she saw my name on those posters her pleasure and satisfaction were so apparent that I could not bear to disillusion her, or to discourage my father's and my brother's equally unrealistic optimism.

ATLANTIC CITY in the spring of 1930 was bursting at the seams. I stared down from my hotel window at the sparkling ocean and at the pleasant pattern the strollers made along the crowded sun-splashed promenade. Unlike that bitter winter's day in Rochester that ushered in *The Beloved Bandit*, today was sweet and balmy, and for a few moments my spirits soared while my faith in omens worked its usual magic. Yet as I turned away from the window, an unshakeable gloom settled over me once more. "No one," I said aloud, "is worried but *you*, and they all know a hundred times more than *you* do, so stop it!" Saying it out loud helped for a moment, but for not much longer.

By the time I reached the theatre, the first dress rehearsal was proceeding in the usual way, and all dress rehearsals are pure hell. This particular hell was Mr. Kaufman's, as director, though as an anguished onlooker I seemed to be doing a good deal more turning on the spit than he was. When I hoarsely whispered to him that the change from the first scene into the second had taken twelve minutes instead of two, he looked at me over his glasses and replied, "I know. I've been here all the time," and let his unconcerned gaze wander back to the stage.

I seem to have no clear recollection of the forty-eight hours after the dress rehearsal. I returned to reality with the arrival of Joe Hyman in my hotel room at six thirty on the night of the opening. He found me standing in my underpants in the bathroom, with my hands outstretched beneath the electric light bulb over the washbasin mirror; I had pulled the cord of the light, then fallen into some bemusement and instead of turning on the water taps I had remained standing with my palms upturned under the bulb, waiting for water to gush forth. "Of all nights for the water to be turned off without warning," I said bitterly to him by way of greeting. "How am I going to shave?"

Joe Hyman turned on the water tap and said, "Hurry up and shave and I'll buy you a good dinner. If things are as terrible as you look, you'll need one."

Joe Hyman's brisk presence brought the world back into focus. To my surprise, I thoroughly enjoyed the large lobster dinner he bought me. Afterwards we strolled along the promenade. The foyer of the Apollo Theatre, when we reached it, was reassuringly jammed. Pushing my way through, I heard again and again, "George S. Kaufman" and "He always writes hits."

Joe Hyman presented his stub to the ticket taker, and we went in. We shook hands silently and I watched him proceed to his seat with a mounting excitement and dread at the pit of my stomach. No one really knows anything much about a play until it meets its first audience; not its director, its actors, its producers, and least of all its author. The scenes he has counted on most strongly are most likely to go down the drain first, sometimes with an audible thud. It is a humbling process.

I turned and looked now for Mr. Kaufman, who, Max Siegel had informed me, always stayed at the back of the theatre during a performance, not looking at the stage, but pacing furiously up and down and listening. Thinking he might expect me to do the same, I had not reserved a seat, but stood anxiously waiting.

Then the house lights dimmed to the warning half-way mark, and from somewhere over my shoulder came an unmistakable snarling voice: "Stop talking and sit down." A group of late-comers gave one startled glance at the grim figure staring at them over the rims of his glasses and scurried silently down the aisle. If Mr. Kaufman saw me, he gave no indication of it.

His wild pacing had already started. Back and forth across the back of the theatre he paced like a man possessed, as indeed he was, by a demon that only the laughter of the audience could exorcise. I started my own pacing from the opposite side, so that we passed and repassed each other as we both reached centre.

The theatre went dark and the audience fell silent as the footlights glowed on. The curtain rose but I resolutely kept my face from the stage, fiercely determined to emulate my hero, whose eyes were glued to the carpet and whose legs were taking even longer strides. A few seconds later, the entire audience broke into a roar of laughter. It marked the first time I had ever heard a theatre audience laugh at something I had written.

I stopped dead in my tracks as though someone had struck me hard across the mouth, and the Lobster Newburg resting fitfully in my stomach took a fearful heave. I was near the stairway fortunately, and I raced down to the men's room just in time.

When I returned, the audience was laughing almost continuously. I stood gaping at the stage, grinning foolishly and then breaking into delighted laughter as the audience laughed. I might have stayed that

way for the rest of the act but for the figure that loomed up beside me and interrupted his pacing long enough to remark thinly: "There were plenty of places where they didn't laugh while you were doing whatever the hell you were doing." Thoroughly ashamed, I resumed my own pacing; and we passed and repassed each other without a word until the curtain fell.

I could tell from the applause that the first act had gone wonderfully. Joe Hyman's face was wreathed in one big satisfied grin. I looked round for Mr. Kaufman, but of course he had gone back-stage. He was to be discovered already seated as the curtain rose on the second act, and he would be putting on his make-up now. I tried to find Sam Harris, who had not been visible until tonight. He caught sight of me over the edge of a group and winked broadly. There could be no doubt that he was immensely pleased. The ushers began to shout, "Curtain going up, second act . . ." and the audience streamed back down the aisles with avidity.

Mr. Kaufman's reception, when the curtain rose, was the biggest of the evening. Every line he uttered drew huge laughs, and when he made his exit a resounding round of applause followed him off.

And then a terrible thing happened. An extraordinary quiet settled over that eager, willing audience. There were laughs during the rest of the act but they were thinnish. The second-act curtain descended to a polite but disappointed hand.

I did not wait for Joe Hyman to come up the aisle this time. I made my cowardly way to the stage alley round the corner, where I stood miserably biting my nails and saying silently over and over, "Oh, God, is it going to be like Chicago again?"

I went back to the theatre for the third act, to find Mr. Kaufman already pacing furiously up and down. He did not speak to me nor I to him as we passed and repassed each other. The third act drew only scattered laughs—and finally, in the last scene, no laughs at all. A deadly cough or two began to echo hollowly through the auditorium—those tell-tale sounds that penetrate a playwright's ear like carefully aimed poison darts—and after the first few tentative coughs a sudden epidemic of respiratory ailments seemed to spread through every chest in the audience. The curtain finally came down on what could only be described as reluctant and somewhat fugitive applause.

Mr. Kaufman had disappeared five minutes before the curtain fell, but I waited for Joe Hyman to come up the aisle. "You got an act and a half of a hit," he said. "What you need pretty badly is the other half." He held out his hand. "It's an awful good act and a half, though," he added. "I better run now if I'm going to catch that train to New York." And he was gone.

I walked slowly up the promenade towards the hotel. I was in no hurry to get there for the conference in Mr. Kaufman's room. I remembered I had once heard Sam Harris say, "You can't pinch pennies in show business, but the great secret is to know when to cut your losses. Make up your mind quickly, take your loss and run." I shivered a little in the warm night air and found that I was already in front of the hotel.

I made my way miserably to my own room in order to change my shirt, which was limp with perspiration. As I stood there the telephone rang. With a pang I remembered I had told the family to call me at eleven thirty sharp, so that I could tell them how the opening had gone. I let it ring without moving. There was no point in giving them bad news until I knew just how bad it might be. I walked out of the room with the telephone still ringing, and down the corridor to Mr. Kaufman's room.

Mr. Kaufman, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, was alone in the room, seated on the sofa, the script already on his knees, a pencil poised above it. He did not look up but gestured towards a table on which stood a Thermos of coffee and two thin sandwiches. "Those are for you," he said. "We'll be working all night." Another gesture motioned me over to the sofa. I sat down beside him.

"You know what didn't go as well as I do," he said. "Curing it is another matter. We'll get to that later. Let's cut right down to the bone first, to give us a clean look at what we've got." Nothing in his manner indicated that there was any thought of abandoning the play. My sigh of relief was so audible that he turned to me and said, "Did you say something?" I shook my head.

There was a knock at the door and I opened it to find Max Siegel. "Mr. Harris's notes," he said, handing over some typewritten sheets. "How's the young author? Not discouraged, I hope." He waved to Mr. Kaufman over my shoulder and walked away. I presented the notes to

Mr. Kaufman. "Later," he remarked, without looking up from the manuscript, and the pencil began to dart surgically over the pages.

Time passed. By four thirty in the morning I was beginning to grow a little dizzy, and it was then that Mr. Kaufman rose from the sofa, walked towards the chest of drawers, and rummaging under a pile of shirts brought out a large brown-paper bag. "Fudge," he said casually, "for energy. Have some." With a satisfied chuckle, he added, "I make it myself."

I looked up at him in surprise. What was even more surprising was the fact that his eyes were shining with a hint of pride. I bit into it and carefully let it melt in my mouth before I gave my report. He was waiting as eagerly for me to taste that piece of fudge as he might wait for a notice in the *Times* after an opening night.

It was awful fudge—gummy and sickly sweet. "It's just wonderful," I lied.

He smiled delightedly and popped a large piece into his own mouth, still looking at me with expectancy. Evidently "just wonderful" wasn't going to be enough. "I didn't know you could make fudge," I said thickly, trying to sound enthusiastic.

"Can't buy it *this* way anywhere," he said, deeply pleased with himself. "Never the right consistency or sweet enough. Matter of fact"—he went on chewing contentedly—"this isn't quite sweet enough. I'll make a new batch to take to Brighton Beach next week. Have some more."

He helped himself to another piece and held the bag out to me. "Best thing I know of to keep you awake."

Just keeping it down will keep me awake, I thought, as I plunged my hand in the bag.

"Thanks," I said brightly, "it certainly does seem to give you energy." And I walked into the bathroom. I flushed the lump of wretched stuff away and emerged from the bathroom falsely chewing away like the traitor I was.

Through the years the brown-paper bag full of that terrible fudge emerged from a good many other drawers. Mr. Kaufman's staunch belief in its energy-giving properties worked like magic—at least, for him—for he worked until seven thirty that morning without so much as a single yawn.

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DURING the rest of that work-filled week in Atlantic City George Kaufman toiled under the grind of rewriting and rehearsals until by the end of it the rigours of social directing seemed to me in retrospect like so much child's play. Some basic element was missing in *Once in a Lifetime* and, in spite of its high sense of fun and rollicking good spirits, the sum total of the evening did not add up to that magical sense of enjoyment that sends an audience away completely satisfied.

On the journey back to New York, the sight of Max Siegel, unsmiling for the first time, was not a warming one. I wondered if or how we were going to be able to fix the play—my brain seemed to go dry if I attempted to focus on it. For the first time in my life I found myself walking down to the subway at Times Square with a sense of actual relief. I needed to escape—if only for the measure of a subway ride back to Brooklyn.

Brooklyn, however, held a surprise in store that I had not quite reckoned with. I was welcomed home on a note of unqualified triumph. My mother could barely wait to get me away from the congratulatory neighbours to proudly parade for my inspection the two new dresses she had bought to celebrate. These twin purchases were explained by the fact that since she expected to attend every performance at Brighton Beach, it was hardly to be expected that she could appear all the week in the same dress. My father and brother had settled for new ties and shirts and would wear their best blue suits every night. It was plainly hopeless to try to persuade any of them that *Once in a Lifetime* might turn out to be a little less than a hit.

By Monday afternoon, the day of the opening at Brighton Beach, I too had succumbed to the general elation just as I had with *The Beloved Bandit*. By the time I took a tram to Brighton Beach, I was in high spirits. I got off the tram four or five blocks before I reached the theatre, for I was early and I wanted also, in my usual way, to seek some hopeful omen for tonight.

Hurrying along the promenade I came suddenly upon a bathhouse that had once been the night club my grandfather had taken us all to on that far-off midsummer night. There could be no doubt that it was



the same building. That night and this place had been too sharply etched in my memory for me to mistake it. I stopped and stood in front of it for a few moments. It had been a long time since I had consciously thought of my grandfather or of my Aunt Kate, but they came back sharply now. If I needed an omen for tonight, there could scarcely be a better one. I hurried on, my spirits soaring.

BRIGHTON BEACH was Atlantic City all over again: the first act and a half played like a hit of vintage rare; the rest of the play was received in a silence that had the breathless hushed quality of a death watch. But if nothing else, that opening taught my mother, in exactly one night, one solid professional attitude: if out-of-town notices are good, they can be acknowledged; if they are bad, they can be brushed aside. By the time I had awakened the next morning, she had read the local papers. "What do Brooklyn papers know about a play, anyway?" she said. "If they were real critics they wouldn't be here in Brooklyn!" She handed them over, and naturally I happened to read the worst one first. *Judging by the names listed on the programme last night, the notice ran, the first act and a half, which is very good indeed, was written by George S. Kaufman, and the rest by Moss Hart.*

I got out of bed and out of the house as fast as I could. There was a drugstore at the corner and I telephoned Mr. Kaufman from there. If the play was going to die in Brighton Beach, I wanted to be alone to hear the news. "Were you planning to work today, Mr. Kaufman?" I asked as casually as I could.

"I think we both need a respite for a couple of days before we tackle it again," he replied. "And by the way, don't let yourself be upset by what that silly fool said. How would he or anyone else know who wrote which parts of a play? It's infuriating. Well, see you there tonight."

We *were* going to tackle it again! I returned home jubilantly, my mind tumbling with ideas about the play and as refreshed as though I had returned from a month in the country.

During that week my mother's faith in the play remained unshaken. At every performance her ringing laughter cut through each silence, but her influence on the Brooklyn theatre-going public was negligible: the audiences were smaller and smaller. What is more, Sam Harris and Max Siegel had appeared only once since the Brighton Beach

opening and Mr. Kaufman had given no sign of being ready to go to work. He was not a man to equivocate or to give his word lightly and I took what comfort I could in that fact. There was, moreover, the solid certainty of his presence in the theatre each night as the curtain rose.

When he did not appear as the house lights dimmed for the final performance on Saturday night, my stomach took a nasty turn, for he was scrupulous about watching each performance from the beginning. I paced back and forth alone for a while and then left the theatre and scanned the street outside. A car had stopped in front of the theatre and Mr. Kaufman was helping Beatrice Kaufman out of it. He looked quite startled when I dashed out of the shadows and ran towards him yelling, "The curtain's up," in a tone of wild jubilation. I stood in front of them both, grinning foolishly.

Beatrice Kaufman gave me a puzzled hello, and after a moment Mr. Kaufman recovered himself sufficiently to ask, "How is it going?"

"Great," I found myself unexpectedly replying.

"Well, that'll be a nice change," he remarked and started towards the foyer. Then he gave me that long-awaited signal. "Come back to the dressing-room at the end of the show so that we can talk for a few minutes, will you?"

From that point onward I hardly bothered to listen to the play at all. In the middle of the third act, I went out into the foyer for a smoke. Walking up and down, I began to sort out in my mind some possibilities for an entirely new last act. When one of the doors of the theatre opened, I was so immersed in my thoughts that I stared unseeing at Beatrice Kaufman for a good thirty seconds before I recognized her. We began to talk and, as always, her effect on me was to induce a sense of exhilaration and gaiety. I heard myself saying now with the intimacy of old acquaintance, "We'll probably see a good deal of each other during the rewrite this summer."

She did not pause in her reply, but her expression changed slightly. "I won't be here this summer," she said. "I'm leaving for France next week." My face must have shown such open mouth-watering envy that she burst into laughter, and said, "I hope it's as good as all that!" She held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said and started for the street door.

Then she turned and came back. She hesitated and seemed to be searching for the right words, but they eluded her, for she sighed and

smiled uncertainly for a moment before she spoke. "You'll be spending summers in Europe yourself some day," she said finally. "You're going to be a very successful playwright. You'll be writing other plays." She moved quickly to the door, smiled another good-bye, and was gone.

I looked after her for a moment, a little warning flick of panic beginning to flutter once more. I picked up the phrase. "You'll be writing other plays," and bit into it, turning it over and over. There had been an undercurrent of compassion in her tone that I did not like. I liked it less and less the more I thought about it.

I waited impatiently for the third act to end and then hurried backstage. Actually, I think I knew what Mr. Kaufman was going to say before he spoke. He was experiencing the same difficulty in finding the right words that Beatrice Kaufman had encountered. "This has not been an easy decision for me," he said slowly and then paused. "It's taken me all the week to come to it, but I'm certain now that I haven't anything more to offer to this play. I've gone dry on it. That happens sometimes." He picked up a towel and began to wipe the cold cream from his face, waiting for some kind of response from me. I stared at his image in the mirror, unable to utter a sound.

"I'm sure you'll get it done again," he said finally. "There's a lot of good stuff there and you may suddenly get an idea that will crack the second and third acts. I wanted you to know that I want no part of any rights or royalties. It's yours free and clear. Sam Harris would like you to come in and see him on Monday, by the way. I imagine he wants to tell you himself that . . ."

He left the sentence eloquently unfinished. I had my breath and my wits back again and I could see he was embarrassed and unhappy. "You're sure you've gone dry on it, Mr. Kaufman?" I finally asked.

He nodded slowly. "I'd be no use to you any more," he said and looked longingly at the door.

"I see," I said and moved towards the doorway. He looked grateful that there were to be no speeches on my part, and he ended the agony by raising that one finger in a gesture of good-bye. I murmured, "Good-bye," and closed the door behind me.

THERE IS a certain excitement about bad news, until the shock has worn off, that is curiously sustaining. I walked along the promenade

surprised to find that I was not feeling bad at all. I was conscious only of weariness. If *Once in a Lifetime* had reached a point of no return, so had I. It was almost a relief to know that this was the end of it. If Kaufman and Harris relinquished a play as unfixable, no other management would pick up the challenge.

It was not until I sat down on a bench and began idly to watch the passers-by that my mood changed with startling swiftness from one of relief to black despair. The promenade that evening was full of couples my own age, for it was like a midsummer night. They strolled slowly and happily along, hand in hand or arms round each other's waists, and all the hopelessness I had been unable to feel before welled up now. I had had no youth as these young people were having it—no idle sweet time. With a stab of grinding jealousy I realized I had never "gone steady" with a girl—time that was free I had hoarded for work, and money that could be spared was for plays that must be seen. I had walked through the years, single-minded, shutting out everything but the glow of footlights—and now those years were over and done with, as irretrievably finished as *Once in a Lifetime*. These light-hearted couples seemed to crystallize the waste I had made of them—a waste that seemed to have led me nowhere but to this promenade tonight.

I have no idea how long I remained there. In every career, in every profession, there must occur a like moment: when the will to survive falters—when the last reserves of ability to pick up and go on seem to have been used up. This was that moment for me, and I was rescued from it by a strongly developed sense of irony that began to break through and give me a glimpse of the truth. For the truth, of course, was that it was ironic for me to envy now what I had never envied before and nonsense to consider as wasted the years in which I had chosen to do exactly what I wanted to do.

It was not accidental that I was sitting on this bench, nor would I have had it otherwise. I had what I wanted even now, just as these boys and girls had exactly what they wanted. The true waste of these years would be to let them slip through my fingers tonight—to accept as final George Kaufman's decision. If he had gone dry, he must be led to the well again. I got up from the bench, walked back along the promenade to where the trams stopped, and waited for one to take me home. That night I slept as though someone had hit me over the head.

Early the following morning I walked back to the little beach where I had written *Once in a Lifetime* and went to work. The one good chance of winning Mr. Kaufman back to the play was to devise new second and third acts that might strike him as worth the gamble. They must be invented today and presented to him not later than tomorrow, or it might well be too late. He was the most sought-after director in the theatre, and his telephone was probably jingling with offers right now. It was an unpleasant thought and I put it firmly out of my mind. I had enough to think about otherwise. To ask him to rewrite two full acts, even if I came up with them, was rather a large order.

It was almost dark when I started for home, my pockets stuffed with pages of yellow paper scribbled over with a rough scenario of the new acts. I felt that there was an outside chance that Mr. Kaufman might accept it. The trick now was to smooth it out and present it to him as skilfully as possible.

I chased my mother out of the kitchen, with the supper dishes still unwashed in the sink, put a chair against the door and sat down to memorize the outline incident by incident. It held up well, even under my anxious testing. If only I could tell it to Mr. Kaufman tomorrow as well as I was telling it to the kitchen sink now, all would be well.

I SMILINGLY walked past the maid who opened the door of 158 East Sixty-third Street at ten o'clock the next morning. She, of course, had no reason to suppose that I was not simply reporting again for work. I had decided it was much too risky to telephone first. I walked upstairs as I had done all winter, and into his room without knocking.

He was having his breakfast and in the middle of a phone call, and he looked very surprised indeed to see me. When he hung up he said, "Good morning," pleasantly enough, though his voice was puzzled.

I knew better now than to make any kind of prefacing speech. Instead, I took out my notes and said, "I worked out a new second and third act, Mr. Kaufman, and I'd like you to hear it."

"Mind if I keep eating?" he said.

"Not at all," I answered. "I'll just keep talking."

I started right off to the crackle of corn flakes and the crunch of toast. The very fact that he was willing to listen I took as a sign that he was still uncommitted to any other play. With the second cup of

coffee he was giving me all of his attention. At last I finished, flushed and a little breathless. Towards the end Mr. Kaufman had retreated to his favourite position, stretched out flat on the floor, and now he slowly and silently arose. "How soon could you move in here?" he said. "That's a full summer's work you've laid out, evenings included."

"I'll go home and pack a suit-case and be right back," I said.

"Tomorrow morning will do," he called after me. "I'll be looking at you all summer."

MR. KAUFMAN did indeed look at me almost all summer long, including most of the evenings. New York broiled that summer with almost no respite, but he seemed impervious to it. Except for Thursday evening of each week, which was the evening he played poker, and a week-end he took off to play in a croquet tournament on Long Island, there was never a halt.

By the middle of July, the second act was finished and with the beginning of the third act the pace accelerated. We were due to go into rehearsal the second week in August, and we were losing part of each day's working time now for recasting and sessions with the scenic artist and costume designer. Two new scenes had been added, one of them calling for the interior of a Hollywood night club called the Pigeon's Egg, where the patrons sat at tables encased in huge cracked eggs and the waitresses were attired as pigeons, feathers and all.

There was some doubt that we would finish in time, and Mr. Kaufman grew noticeably edgy. But four days before rehearsals were scheduled to begin he turned towards me and said, "I think you ought to stand up or lie down or shut up or go away or something—I'm about to type *The End*." He typed the two words and grinned. "No farewell speech to the troops?" he asked.

I shook my head and grinned back. Then I packed my suit-case and went back to Brooklyn to wait.

WHEN I WALKED through the stage door of the Music Box four days later, it seemed to me I was some light-years removed from the wide-eyed hopeful who had walked shyly through it last spring, embarrassed at being too early. I was arriving with the management this time, and I would not panic. But behind my professional manner was

a knowledge of the torment and fatigue that lay beyond this first rehearsal and I shrank from facing it all again. Sam Harris coming through the stage door just behind me, greeted me, "Hi, kid. We're playing for keeps this time, eh?" I nodded and walked to the table where Mr. Kaufman already sat waiting.

The next three weeks, before *Once in a Lifetime* opened in Philadelphia, were the worst three weeks I have ever spent in rehearsal. I was unhappy in the theatre and miserable away from it. The truth of it was I was no longer willing or able to trust my own theatrical judgment.

My leave-taking from my family for Philadelphia was far soberer than my light-hearted departure for Atlantic City. Even my mother now dimly realized that my new profession was largely a gamble so far as eating and paying the rent was concerned, for we were once again at a dangerously low ebb financially. Indeed, without my brother, who had his first job that summer, I doubt that we could have managed at all.

Fortunately the atmosphere of a company on the way to an out-of-town opening is always so hopeful and high-spirited that it is hard to remain downcast. Apart from their buoyant spirits, actors usually carry with them for these weeks out of town their cats, their dogs, their parakeets and canaries, and sometimes even their tropical fish, all of which lend a carnival air to a journey. By the time the train pulled into Philadelphia I was feeling surprisingly cheerful, though the heat, as we stepped on to the station platform, was grisly.

Mr. Kaufman and I drove straight to the Lyric Theatre to have a look at the new set. A good many of the company had already wandered into the theatre, and when the asbestos curtain was taken up they burst into laughter and then into applause. The Pigeon's Egg was a remarkable set—Hollywood extravagance at its wildest. It seemed to me that every funny line in the scene would be enhanced by it, and fortunately it was the last scene in the play. I walked out at once, leaving Mr. Kaufman in charge of the drudgery. An author's living expenses out of town are paid by the management, as long as he eats at the hotel, and the hotel was just where I was going. Fresh from Mr. Kaufman's Spartan teas of watercress and cucumber sandwiches, I ordered a tea of my own which included Baked Alaska.

I ate my way through four days and nights of dress rehearsals.

Never had the play's chances seemed so bright. When it was time to get ready for the opening, I looked out of the window and saw, of all things, a rainbow. That rainbow seemed to call for something more than just staring. I went to the telephone and asked the porter if he could get me a bottle of whisky. Rich people in the movies were always sipping whisky while they dressed for dinner. I sipped it slowly in the bath and mused on the pleasant shape of things to come.

EVEN Mr. Kaufman seemed to have an unwonted air of gaiety when I ran into him backstage on my rounds of wishing the cast good luck, and Sam Harris in the foyer exuded a confidence tonight that had not been there before. I looked impatiently at the last stragglers going down the aisle. I wanted to have the first act over and done with. I knew they would laugh at the first act.

It played thunderously, even better than it had before, and as the curtain rose on the second act Mr. Kaufman received his usual reception, and his usual round of applause as he made his exit. I held my breath—the next few minutes would tell the story.

I did not have to hold it for long. They were laughing loudly now in all the places where there had been only silence before, and as the undiminished laughter kept on I began to bang delightedly on the back of the orchestra stalls rail with my fists. A blue-suited figure was immediately at my side. "Don't interrupt them, you fool," hissed Mr. Kaufman, but I could tell he was as delighted as I was. The wonderful sound of laughter kept coming in wave after wave, and, in spite of that pacing figure near by, I began to laugh with them myself. The second act came down to even greater applause than the first and an unmistakable buzz filled the theatre even before the house lights came up.

There is something almost touching about the way a thoroughly satisfied audience comes up the aisles. They beam at each other with pleasure. Sam Harris, caught in the crush, saw me and winked broadly, and right behind him Max Siegel's smile seemed to be running straight off his face and into his ears. Foyer-listening is dangerous, but tonight, threading my way through the audience, I heard, "Funniest play I've seen in years," and "Wait until this hits Broadway."

When I followed the audience back into the theatre, I saw Mr. Kaufman beginning to pace back and forth as the house lights dimmed. I

went over to him and tried to modulate my excitement to his own conservative pitch. "They seem to like it, Mr. Kaufman," I said.

To my surprise, he put a hand on my shoulder and said, "You deserve it," and then quickly walked away.

When the third act began, the audience's response to the Pigeon's Egg was almost excessive. They gave a great whoop of laughter and then broke into applause. I took my place at the back of the orchestra stalls rail. This was the act we were both certain contained the funniest moments of the play.

Their laughter came promptly as the applause died and the scene went on, but it was not, I quickly noticed, of the same kind. It was a little forced, as though the audience were prepared to laugh at costumes and props until this good play came to life again. But the play was not coming to life again, and their laughter was growing weaker and more fitful, and finally at about the middle of the act it ceased altogether. For once Mr. Kaufman had stopped his pacing and was standing staring at the stage as aghast as I was. We had gone terribly wrong somewhere. He came over to me just before the third act ended and whispered, "We're too close to a hit now not to get this right. Meet me in half an hour."

It was a disappointed audience that filed out of the theatre, but we had both largely recovered from our own shock by the time we sat facing each other in Mr. Kaufman's room. One thing was inescapable. Two acts were right now, where only one had been right before. It seemed impossible not to be able to lick a last act. Mr. Kaufman brought out a bag of fudge, placed the manuscript on his knees, and went right to work without further discussion. He worked that night and through the following nights like a man possessed. Something more than just a play was at stake. His professional pride was involved now that he was so tantalizingly close to a hit. He drove himself, and me along with him, and I lost count of the number of new scenes that were written every night, and played, rough or not, that same evening, only to be tossed out after one performance.

Imperceptibly at first, and then unmistakably, I began to detect little tell-tale signs of discouragement in Mr. Kaufman. He still worked without let-up, but his air was pessimistic. Finally, on the Tuesday

night of our third and last week in Philadelphia, he brought it out into the open. He was taking the midnight train to New York to meet Beatrice Kaufman on her return from Europe, and he would be back in time for the matinée tomorrow. He tossed the new scene we had played that evening into the dressing-room waste-paper basket and removed the last of the make-up from his face.

"We may have to settle for what we've got," he said. "We must give the company a chance to play the same show four performances in a row before we open in New York. I'm going to freeze it as it stands on Thursday night."

"What do you think our chances are in New York?" I asked.

"Not good, if you have to have my honest opinion." He was silent for a moment. "Well, no one can say we didn't try. We're freezing the show Thursday night, Sam," he called to Sam Harris, who had appeared in the doorway. "And good-bye—I'm just going to make that train."

Sam Harris glanced briefly at the typed pages scattered round the waste-paper basket. "Come on out and have a beer, kid," he said. "Do you good. Never saw two guys work harder."

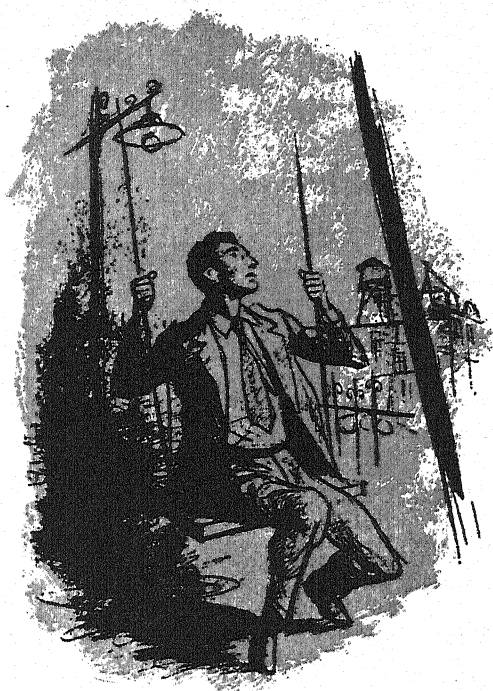
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SERENDIPITY (the art of finding agreeable things not sought for) is a word that has fallen into disuse, but it describes precisely what happened that night with Sam Harris. In a little place just round the corner from the Ritz Hotel, we sat drinking our beer, our minds relaxed, going over the play, scene by scene and almost line by line. Just before the place closed, when the waiters were piling the chairs up on top of the tables, my ear caught a phrase Sam Harris had used before that evening, but whose meaning had escaped me. "I wish, kid," he sighed, "that this weren't such a noisy play."

"Noisy, Mr. Harris? What do you mean by a noisy play?"

"It's a noisy play, kid," he reiterated. "Except for two minutes at the beginning of the first act, there isn't a spot in this whole play where two people sit down and talk quietly to each other. Is that right, or isn't it?"

I looked at him a little stunned and said, "Is that what you mean by noisy?"



"Maybe *noisy* is the wrong word," he said. "But I've watched this play maybe a hundred times and it's a tiring play to sit through, kid. I can almost feel the audience begin to get tired all round me. That stage is so full of actors and scenery and costumes and props all the time they never get a chance to sit back and kind of add the whole thing up." He signalled the waiter for the bill, then laughed. "It's a noisy play, kid, you take my word for it."

I stared at him silently, an odd excitement beginning to take possession

of me. He got out of the lift at his own floor, but I was wide awake now. I went down again and began to walk. It was a hot moonlight night, and when I stumbled upon a children's playground I walked to a swing and sat down on it. I swung back and forth, high and wildly, creating an impression of coolness. I was absorbed in threading my way through that third act, and with a shock of recognition I thought I saw clearly where we had gone wrong, and then, in a sudden flash, exactly the right way to resolve it. I let the swing come to a stop and sat there staggered at the audacity of the idea.

It called for tossing the Pigeon's Egg out of the show entirely—that was twenty thousand dollars' worth of scenery—and extending Mr. Kaufman's second-act part of the New York playwright into the third act, for a quiet scene with Jean Dixon, the leading lady. The first-act train scene, which had brought them all out to Hollywood, could be repeated and was the logical setting for it.

Everything clicked into place now. New lines began tumbling into my mind, and the new scene on the train began to blossom and grow in a way that made me itch to call Mr. Kaufman in New York and get him out of bed to tell it to him. But my audacity had limits.

I WAS WAITING for Mr. Kaufman in his dressing-room when he came back the next afternoon. He was late and the first act was almost over, and I talked quickly while he put on his make-up. He listened attentively, but I could tell he was rejecting the idea. When I had finished, he said, "It's too late. I don't think we dare take this kind of gamble now."

I had no ready answer, and the stage manager was already knocking at the door and calling out, "Second act, Mr. Kaufman." I followed him downstairs and went back to the hotel. I threw myself on the bed and for a long time stared up at the ceiling. I was no longer certain that I had found an inspired way of snatching victory from defeat, but I knew that unless we at least made the attempt the fate of the play was sealed. Mr. Kaufman was not an easy man to tackle once he had said no to anything, but after the *matinée* I went to his room. There was little to be lost now in trying to make him change his mind.

He was in the bath when I went in and for once he looked beaten and exhausted. His eyes remained closed all the while I talked. I took my time and I went over the same ground I had covered in the dressing-room, but I presented it well this time and made an impassioned plea at the end. When I had finished he reached for his glasses on the edge of the bath and put them on. Now he regarded me silently over the rims. "You have as much right to say yes to anything about this play as I have to say no," he said slowly. "It may be that my timidity is too great. If you feel this strongly, why don't you skip the show tonight and stay here and make a rough draft that we can work on when I get back. Maybe I'll be able to see what you see more clearly than I'm able to see it now." He sighed. "I'd like to play my part of the show tonight right from this bath. Might help business, too." He closed his eyes wearily again.

I forgot about dinner and went right to work. When an idea is sound it writes easily, and I struck pay-dirt early. By the time Mr. Kaufman returned from the theatre I had something ready to show him. He

read it with more than just polite interest, and then took my rough draft to the typewriter. "Well, here goes twenty thousand dollars'-worth of scenery," he said and inserted a new piece of paper.

I sat staring at him, seized by a sudden panic at the enormity of what I had started. "If this doesn't work and we can't go back to the old third act, Mr. Kaufman, what happens then?" I asked.

He looked at me quizzically over the glasses. "I sue you," he replied. "Hand me that bag of fudge and let's get to work."

I WATCHED the rehearsal the next day with feelings not unlike, I suspected, those held by the company itself. Their faith in Mr. Kaufman did not waver, but their alarm at being asked to make so drastic a change, with a New York opening less than a week away, was evident. It was a long rehearsal and rough on everyone, Mr. Kaufman included. He had to learn new lines himself, redirect some of the old stuff, and stage the new train scene—and all of it had to be done for the evening's performance.

As the afternoon wore on I slumped farther and farther down in my seat, and finally I could sit still no longer. I did the first two things that occurred to me. I telephoned Joe Hyman and asked him to get on the six-o'clock train for Philadelphia, and I sneaked back to the hotel and ordered the largest dinner even I had ever had the gall to order. Terror, as always, had increased my appetite.

By the time that I reached the theatre again at eight o'clock, I was having a serious attack of hiccups. I wheezed a few words to Joe Hyman and fled gasping back to a drugstore. I gulped some paregoric and then held my breath while the pharmacist pressed his fingers behind my ears. An old lady suggested that the best way to cure hiccups was to scare the living daylight out of the victim, a method which had invariably worked when she was a little girl. Since I was not a little girl, and frightened enough already, I returned to the theatre.

One look at the Pigeon's Egg set, stacked in the stage alley to be carted to the storehouse, set me off again. Finally, still roaring like a calliope, and frantic that I might have to miss the new third act, I walked in the balcony entrance and ran up the stairs to the topmost gallery; there was not a soul in it, and I took a seat in the last row just as the lights came up on the new train scene that would tell the whole

story. I wondered at that moment if the old lady at the drug counter had not been correct; I felt as though the daylights had indeed been scared out of me—and my hiccups had miraculously subsided.

The curtain rose on the train set, and immediately there was an unmistakable sign that we were on the right track at long last. The audience broke into understanding and appreciative laughter—not the whoop of laughter that the Pigeon's Egg always dazzled them into giving, but the more valuable laughter of an audience that was taking the play into its own hands. Jean Dixon was seated alone in the Pullman car, but her aloneness in a train that was obviously headed back to New York told them all they needed to know without a line being spoken. The stage, silent for once, created the exact sense of climax that we had previously tried so unsuccessfully to achieve. The Pullman porter entered and a moment later Mr. Kaufman followed him on. The biggest laugh an audience was capable of giving greeted his appearance, and I knew that our search for the last act had ended.

I could barely hear the words being spoken on the stage, but I did not need to. The quiet scene Sam Harris had asked for was playing to the biggest laughs in the play, and the laughter became one continuous roar. I closed my eyes and just listened until the scene was over, then I walked downstairs and watched the final scene of the play from the back of the orchestra stalls. With the momentum of the train scene behind it, it played flawlessly. *Once in a Lifetime* was playing like a hit right up to the curtain. I left the orchestra stalls rail and leaned against the back wall. I watched Sam Harris and Max Siegel applauding as though they were seeing the play for the first time, and I saw Joe Hyman leave his seat and dash up the aisle in search of me. But I was suddenly too tired to want to hear what they had to say, or to care. I wanted of all things to go home, and I wanted to go home with the passionate unreasonableness of a six-year-old.

AS I OPENED the door of the apartment in Brooklyn early Sunday morning I was immediately conscious that this home-coming was different from any other. It had never occurred to me to seek counsel or comfort among my family but tonight I was secretly pleased to find them all waiting up for me. I warmed my hands and my heart in their affection. I felt closer to my mother and father than I had for years, and

my brother in particular was a surprising source of comfort. The last year had changed him greatly. His diffidence had vanished and with it his withdrawal from me. We sat at the kitchen table talking together after my mother and father had gone to bed, and drinking coffee. It was the first time such a thing had happened between us, and I became slowly aware that behind his innumerable questions about the play lay a secret pride in me.

He had cut out all the pictures and advertisements for the play from tomorrow's Sunday papers and tacked them all over the kitchen walls for my homecoming. He had also collected every word that had appeared about *Once in a Lifetime*, and, as I turned the pages of the neatly pasted scrapbook he presented to me, it was my turn to be silent. The stranger at whose side I had slept for so many years was offering his friendship and I, who was never at a loss for words, suddenly could not find my tongue.

THE COMPANY, when they assembled for a run-through on Monday morning, greeted each other with the hungry affection of exiles returning to their native land. But that day and the following one the proceedings on the stage of the Music Box were more like a series of explosions than anything else. Actors lost their tempers, each in turn. Entrances were missed or exits bungled. Miss Dixon broke out into hives, and one actor could not remember a single line. Mr. Kaufman, however, was at his most winning and understanding; he rode out the storm like a pilot searching out the eye of a hurricane, unruffled and detached, and the final rehearsal on opening day was a short one.

I weathered the afternoon by riding round Central Park in a hansom cab—something I had always longed to do—and suddenly it was time to meet the family for dinner, and just as suddenly it was time to leave them in Joe Hyman's charge and go on to the theatre to wish the company good luck.

I walked towards *Once in a Lifetime*, and as I pushed my way through the crowd of first-night gawkers to the stage door panic suddenly caught up with me. I took the bundle of telegrams the stage doorman handed me and then promptly dropped them. He picked them up and stuffed them into my pocket without a word, as though he had performed the same service several times before this evening.

My legs seemed to have no relationship whatever to my body and I decided to sit on the stage for a while. I sat down in the stage manager's corner and took the bundle of telegrams out of my pocket. My spirits lifted with each one that I opened. There were a good many touching and unexpected names signed to them—George Steinberg and Irving Morrison; the box-office man at the Mayfair Theatre, where I had played *The Emperor Jones*; summer-camp guests I had all but forgotten; Augustus Pitou; a group of the boys to whom I had told those stories on the stoop outside the candy shop, who carefully explained who they were; Priestly Morrison and Mrs. Henry B. Harris; all the little-theatre groups; Mr. Neuburger of my fur-vault days; Herb of the Half Moon Country Club. . . . The years leaped out of each envelope with quicksilver flashes of memory, the old jumbled with the new, and something like calm began to settle over me.

The years that I held in my hand seemed somehow to have been arranged in a design of marvellous felicity, all of them taking me to this hidden corner of the stage tonight. I looked round me with wonder. The muted sound of the audience out front, the coloured gelatines in the banks of the lights above me, the minor players already hovering in the wings, the voiceless hum of excitement—these were the sights and sounds that no longer belonged to an impossible dream, but to this corner where I was part of them.

Not until I heard Max Seigel's voice saying to the stage manager, "They're all in; take the house lights down," could I bring myself to move. I walked through the pass door into the theatre, and in the half-light I saw a sea of faces—critics, agents, columnists, all the stony first-night faces. I fled up the aisle, almost colliding with Mr. Kaufman, whose pacing had already begun. He muttered something that might have been "Good luck" and was on his way again. Applause turned me towards the stage. The curtain was rising; Jean Dixon made her entrance, the applause swelled, and as it died down she spoke the opening lines. No sound issued from her lips. One could see her lips moving, but that was all. The audience began to murmur and turn in their seats. I looked wildly towards Mr. Kaufman. He stood frozen in his tracks, staring at the stage. Still no sound came, and then in the silence a man's voice from the balcony rang out loud and clear: "It's the fans—turn off the fans!"

The audience broke into relieved laughter and applause and almost at once the fans on either side of the proscenium began to slow down. In the opening-night excitement, the electrician had simply forgotten to turn them off. Invariably, when horrors of this kind occur, the audience behaves admirably and they did so now. They not only applauded that unknown hero in the balcony, but they rewarded Jean Dixon with a generous round of applause when she went back and started the scene all over again.

FROM THAT MOMENT onward, the play was played and received like a playwright's dream of a perfect opening night. At the end of each act the applause broke before the curtain had quite touched the floor. The second act played better than the first, and the third act—that exasperating third act—seemed to have written itself, so effortlessly was it playing. The final lines of the play were being spoken now, and then it came—an explosive crash of applause as the curtain fell. It came like a thunderclap, full and tumultuous. The entire audience was remaining in its seats and keeping the curtain going up and down as the cast stood bowing and smiling. To my amazement, I saw Mr. Kaufman step forward and signal the stage manager to keep the curtain up. I stared in disbelief—he was about to make a curtain speech. The audience seemed almost as surprised as I was. The applause stilled immediately and an eager “shushing” took its place. He came forward another step, peered at them over his glasses, and waited for complete quiet.

“I would like this audience to know,” he said carefully and slowly, “that eighty per cent of this play is Moss Hart.” That was all. He stepped back and signalled the stage manager to lower the curtain.

I stood staring. Generosity does not flower easily in the rocky soil of the theatre. Not often is a young playwright welcomed into it with a *beau geste* as gallant and selfless as the one that had just come over those footlights. A hand was tugging at my sleeve and Max Siegel was whispering some words in my ear, but I moved quickly away without answering. I did not trust my voice, and I was ashamed to have him see that my eyes were blurred.

THERE WAS a great horde of people clustered in front of Mr. Kaufman's dressing-room. Beatrice Kaufman caught sight of me, blew me a



kiss and waved to me to make my way in, but I shook my head. What I wanted to say to him could not be said in front of strangers. I shouted back, "Tell him I was here," and pushed my way down the stairs again. Each dressing-room and landing was jammed with friends who had come backstage. I heard Sam Harris's soft laughter rise from the crowd that surrounded him; but I made no attempt to go towards him.

I felt unaccountably disconnected from the uproar round me; it seemed to have no connection with what had made the evening possible—with hotel rooms, a typewriter; with pacing up and down in the dark. The world had moved in. I walked across the stage to where my family and friends stood waiting, a little knot of alien corn in the swirling mass of black ties and jewels and evening gowns. I felt as alien as they looked. After I had kissed my mother and father and listened to all the

congratulations, I stood helplessly rooted to the spot. I had lived for this moment for so long that it was difficult to accept it as reality. I have always understood the unbelieving look in the eyes of those whom success touches early—it is a look half fearful, as though the dream were still in the process of being dreamed and to move or to speak would shatter it.

It was Joe Hyman, not I, who finally shepherded all of us to a restaurant to wait for the notices. Somewhere during that long wait I began to believe that a play of mine had opened on Broadway and that the notices I was waiting to read might change my life from this moment onward. Someone gave me a drink and I began to shake so that it was impossible to lift it to my lips.

The notices were a blaze of glory. When the last one had been read aloud, I knew that my life was indeed changed for ever.

11

MY FAMILY had long since gone home on the strength of the first glowing notice; but it was broad daylight when Joe Hyman and I came out of the restaurant and peered down the streets of the sleeping city, searching for a taxi. This was an historic moment. My last subway ride was behind me. When a cab pulled up beside us we silently shook hands. We had completed the circle of *Once in a Lifetime* together—from Atlantic City to New York. I waved at him through the rear window until the cab turned the corner, and then settled back in the seat, determined not to fall asleep. I had no intention of dozing through the first ride to Brooklyn above ground.

No one has ever seen the skyline of New York from Brooklyn Bridge as I saw it that morning with three hit notices under my arm. It was a grey day and the buildings were half shrouded in mist, but it was a city that had not turned me aside, a city that I loved. Unexpectedly a great wave of feeling for this proud and beautiful city swept over me. We were off the bridge now and driving through a sprawling, ugly area of tenements. I stared through the taxi window at a pinch-faced ten-year-old hurrying down the steps on some morning errand before school, and I thought of myself hurrying on so many grey mornings out of a doorway and a house much the same as this one. It was

possible in this wonderful city for that nameless little boy—for any of its millions—to have a decent chance to scale the walls and achieve what they wished. The only credential the city asked was the boldness to dream.

THE FAMILY was still fast asleep when I unlocked the door and stepped into the apartment. I was tempted to wake them up at once and show them the other notices, but I went into the kitchen instead and made a pot of coffee. I wanted a little more time alone to think about something. I stood in the doorway of the kitchen while I waited for the water to boil and gazed at the sleeping figure of my brother on the day bed in the dining-room. The frayed carpet on the floor was the carpet I had crawled on before I could walk. Each piece of ugly furniture in the cramped dim room seemed mildewed with a thousand double-edged memories. To walk out of this world for ever—not piece-meal, but completely—would give meaning to the wonder of what had happened to me. I poured myself a cup of coffee, and by the time I had finished it my mind was made up.

I woke my brother and then called through the bedroom door to my mother and father to get up right away. I gave them barely time to read the notices and then plunged. "We're moving into New York today—as soon as you have had a cup of coffee—and we're not taking anything with us. We're walking out of here with just the clothes on our backs."

My mother stared at me. "Where are we going?" she asked.

"To a hotel," I said, "until we find an apartment and furnish it." There was a stunned silence. "No," I said in answer to her startled look round the room. "We don't take anything—not even a toothbrush. We buy it all new in New York. You can give all this stuff to the janitor."

"I'm not walking out of here without the pictures," my mother said with great firmness.

It was my turn to be astonished. "What pictures?" I asked.

"All the pictures," she replied. "The baby pictures of you and Bernie and the pictures of my father and my sister, and Bernie's diploma and your letters, and all the other pictures and things I've got in the closet in that big box."

I threw my arms round her and kissed her. I had won. "One suit-case," I ordered. "Put it all into one suit-case, but only one."

"Don't you have to give *some* of the money to George Kaufman?" my brother said.

"Half," I replied. "But my share will be over a thousand dollars a week."

"That'll buy a lot of toothbrushes," he said. "I'm going to get ready." And he climbed out of bed.

My mother and father stared at me. "It's true," I said soberly. "It's not a salary. I get a percentage of every dollar that comes into the box office."

Obviously, it had never occurred to them to translate my good fortune into anything more than what my mother's friends defined as "making a good living." My mother's reaction now was a curious one. She burst into a peal of laughter. She had a merry and ringing laugh and it was contagious. My father and I joined in her laughter, though we would have been hard put to tell exactly what we were laughing at.

We were all ready to leave in less than an hour despite the fact that there were more things in that box in the closet than could be contained in one suit-case. I carried the box, my father and brother each carried a suit-case, and my mother, her victory complete, hugged a brown-paper parcel of last-minute treasures. We walked out of the door and I slammed the door of the apartment without looking back.

TO EVERYONE'S surprise, including my own, a strange silence fell upon us in the taxi. My mother took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. They were not, I suspected, tears for the beginning of something, but for the end of something none of us could name. Not until we came within sight of Brooklyn Bridge did anyone speak. Then, as suddenly as it had fallen, the silence lifted. We started to talk, all of us at once, as if crossing the bridge had cut the old ties irrevocably and was a symbol of entry into a world as dazzling as the skyline in front of us.

I had told the driver to take us to the Edison Hotel in Forty-seventh Street, but as the cab moved into Times Square I asked him to stop first at the Music Box. As he pulled up I saw a long double line of people extending the full length of the foyer from the box office and

spilling out under the canopy. I got out of the cab and walked into the foyer and stood gaping at all the people. It was not yet half past nine in the morning. The box-office man caught sight of me and smiled. He waved me over to the head of the line and stuck his hand out through the opening in the grille to shake my own. "A year at least," he said. "It's the hottest ticket in town. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to draw five hundred dollars. I'm moving into town."

"Sure, sure—anything you want," he said.

I signed an I.O.U. slip as he counted out the money, conscious that the people behind me were whispering to each other. "It is *not* George Kaufman," I heard a woman's voice say. "It must be the other one."

I took the stack of dollar bills in my fist and walked out and into the taxi. Without a word I went through the pretence of counting the money. "When," my brother said quietly, "do they change the name of the theatre to the Money Box?"

It was the first of a series of bad puns that he was to send racketing down the years, and its effect was not only uproarious but explosive. We started to laugh and could not stop. We laughed as though we were out of our wits, uncontrolled and breathless with laughter. Our exhaustion and excitement needed a release, and that atrocious pun had been both a means and a blessing. We laughed as though we might never stop.

The driver, too, started to shake with laughter and turned round apologetically. "I don't know what you're laughing at, folks," he said, "but it must be pretty good to make people laugh that way." He burst into laughter again himself and turned the cab towards Broadway.

My fatal weakness for drama overcame me once more. I could hear myself telling the whole story to Sam Harris. Unresisting I let it take shape in my mind. The wait for the notices, the first taxi ride home, the decision to walk out—I could hear myself telling it all to him, right down to counting the money in the cab, our paroxysm of laughter, and the cab driver turning round to add the final touch. I could see his eyes squint with amusement as I told it and hear his soft laughter afterwards. I could even, I thought, hear his comment.

"Not bad, kid," he would say. "Not a bad curtain for a first act."

Moss Hart

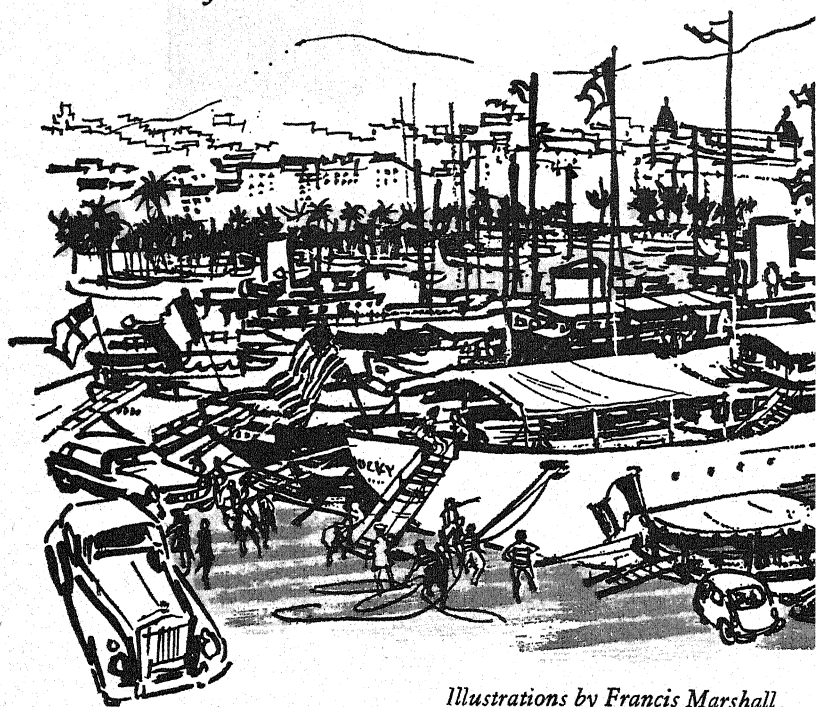


IT IS NOW more than thirty years since the success of the play *Once in a Lifetime*, and during that time hit after hit has come from the pen of Moss Hart. His reputation as a stage director now equals his fame as an author of *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and *You Can't Take it With You*, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

As well as his witty comedies, he has written (in collaboration with Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and George Gershwin) a number of sparkling musicals, one of which (*Lady in the Dark*) starred the late Gertrude Lawrence and launched the career of Danny Kaye. Moss Hart's career as a director was recently crowned by his magnificent staging of the legendary *My Fair Lady*.

Mr. Hart lives in New York City. He is married to Kitty Carlisle, the actress and television star. They have a son and daughter aged twelve and nine.

*Whoever
allows
himself
to be
caught
is a
fool*

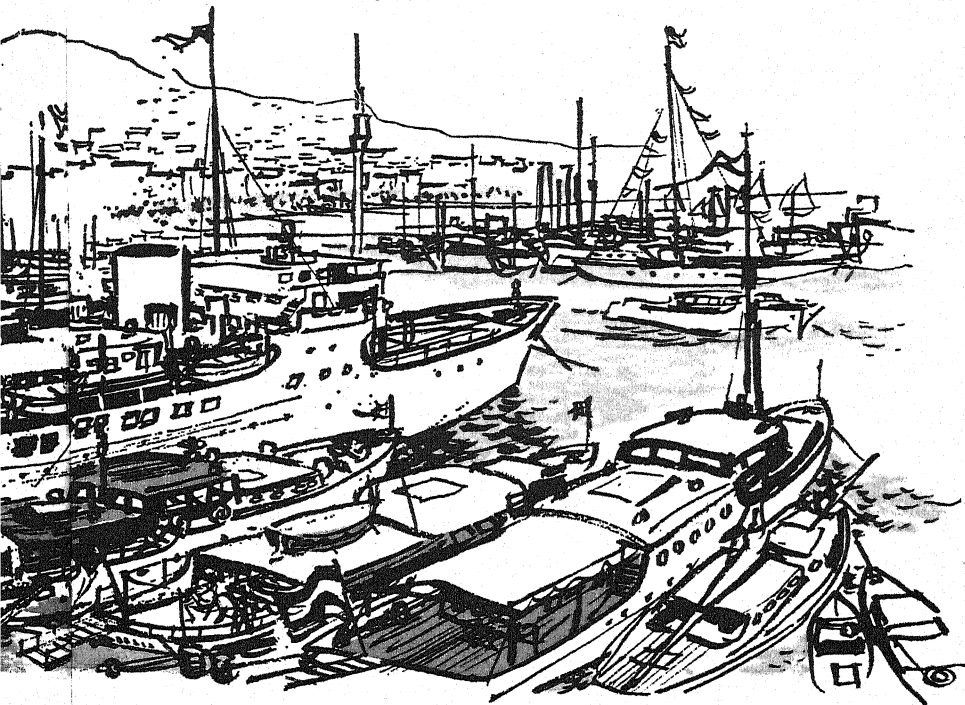


Illustrations by Francis Marshall

WOMAN OF STRAW

A condensation of the book by

CATHERINE ARLEY



"Woman of Straw" is published by Collins, London

WHY SHOULD a "man of considerable means" have to advertise in order to find a wife? This was the thought that occurred to Hilde when she came across the advertisement in the personal column of a Hamburg newspaper. For most of her life she had been lonely and poor, her family had been wiped out in the war, and she could not help feeling that life owed her the chance of wealth and adventure. She determined to take that chance. . . .

It might have turned out all right *if*—but there are a hundred tantalizing "ifs" in this story of a woman who finds herself trapped in a diabolical plot. Here is an ingenious and exciting novel of murder and suspense played out against such varied backgrounds as Germany, the Riviera, Sicily, Bermuda and New York.

"I read it at a sitting, enthralled."

—*Manchester Evening News*

"... brilliant in execution."

—*Illustrated London News*



One

THAT morning in Hamburg, when Hildegarde opened the door of her flat, she knew at once that it was Friday because the weekly paper was balanced on the milk bottle. She was never to forget this day when everything began, but now it seemed only another moment in the monotonous week. She picked up the paper, closed the door again and shuffled off to the kitchen in her slippers.

Switching on the radio, she cut a couple of slices from a loaf of bread, slipped them into the toaster and put some milk on to boil.

Then she opened the paper, looking neither at the headlines nor at the pictures. On page six were the marriage advertisements. There were two columns—the left one reserved for single women in search of a companion, the right one for lonely men.

It was the latter column that interested Hilde.

Every week she studied it eagerly, awaiting her opportunity. Romance and sentiment meant nothing to her. She had not the slightest interest in marrying the inconsolable widower with a family on his hands, the shy young man or even the well-to-do tradesman. She was only too well acquainted with mediocrity: it was her present life—the translations she made for a publishing house barely enabled her to scrape along. No, life should be exciting; it should have nothing in common

with her dull existence. Sooner or later, something was bound to happen.

She must not skip a single word. The advertisements consisted of three or four lines printed in abbreviations. It needed some experience to decode them, but she was an expert.

Her eyes ran over the lines while her hands raised the buttered toast to her lips.

Suddenly her heart seemed to stop. The advertisement was there . . . the golden nugget she had looked for for so long.

Hilde reread it slowly: *Man of considerable means seeks agreeable companion, view to marriage. Hamburg woman preferred, single but sophisticated, no family or ties, who would welcome life of luxury and enjoy travel.*

Her brain started to work. . . . *Considerable means* It was of course fantastic that a rich man should be reduced to finding a wife through the advertisements in a marriage column.

Hamburg woman preferred . . . single, no family or ties. . . . He probably preferred to marry a compatriot. The reservation about family was doubtless a precaution against sponging relatives.

And now the magic phrase *Man of considerable means seeks agreeable companion* danced once more before Hilde's eyes. Perhaps he was tired of the women in his own circle. Perhaps he was ugly, no longer young. But, after all, the physical was unimportant when there was wealth to smooch the way.

Her mind was made up. There was not a moment to lose if she wanted to be in the running. Fate would decide after that. . . . Hilde entrusted herself to Fate—but was quite determined to do all she could to triumph over every rival.

So far most of her life had consisted of loneliness and poverty, of a series of tragedies during the war that had proved so disastrous for Germany. Now she had a right, like everyone else, to a little happiness. Perhaps it lay in her power to change the grey course of her existence. She believed in luck and was not afraid of adventuring.

Conscientiously she made a few rough drafts of a letter. There was no point in bluffing. The recipient would know that all the women who replied were poor. Her final application, copied in her best handwriting, ran as follows:

Sir,

Having lost everything in the bombing attacks on Hamburg—friends, family and money—I ask nothing better than to break entirely with the tragic past and to begin a new life. I have few romantic illusions left, and from your advertisement I believe we should be admirably suited to each other.

I am thirty-four, tall, fair-haired, reasonably pretty, without family, husband or child and with no plans or hopes of a sentimental nature.

I have fallen in love first with your money and then with the luxurious mode of life you offer.

Since you are rich and have to use the advertisement columns to find yourself a wife, I feel there must be a fly in the ointment; but whatever it is, I feel capable of dealing with it. I think it would be best for us to lay our cards on the table at once.

If your advertisement is serious, you will find me willing to comply scrupulously with the conditions of whatever agreement we may reach.

Yours faithfully,

Hildegard Meisner

Adding her address, she slipped the sheet into the envelope, sealed it, and smiled rather sceptically at the little white square which might put her in touch with her King Midas.

Hilde had to wait two months for an answer. She did not worry unduly since she was certain that the advertiser would have to sort out a host of other applications.

Taking a chance, she ordered herself a very smart suit, which made a great hole in her savings. If things turned out well she must look her best at the first interview. She gave up eating starches and three times a week she gave herself a facial. Twice a day she looked in the letter-box.

One morning, when she had just begun to despair, she caught her breath in shock. A letter had arrived with a Cannes postmark. She stood there turning it over two or three times before plucking up the courage to open it.

At last she tore open the envelope and read:

Dear Miss Meisner,

The many replies I received to my advertisement have prevented my writing earlier, although your letter immediately aroused my interest.

Your unusual frankness was very refreshing. You seem to personify the young and enterprising woman I am looking for.

So that we may become better acquainted, I have taken the liberty of enclosing an air ticket to Cannes. I have also reserved a room for you at the Carlton Hotel.

Whatever your future decision may be, I shall be delighted to consider you my guest for as long as you care to remain on the Côte d'Azur. May I add that I am looking forward to meeting you.

Respectfully yours

The signature that followed was illegible, but the envelope contained an air ticket, dated the following week.

Hilde sank down in a chair, the letter in one hand and the ticket in the other.

My future is in my hands, she thought, and smiled at the threadbare cliché. Perhaps she would not pull it off. Well, what do I risk, she thought. If things turn out badly I shall have had an enjoyable holiday at no expense.

Two

ON HER ARRIVAL at the hotel in Cannes Hilde found flowers in her bedroom, with a little note of welcome. It wished her a pleasant stay, told her a sum of French francs had been left for her at the desk, and fixed an appointment for four o'clock the next afternoon in suite 306.

The moment finally came. The door to the ante-room of the suite stood open so she entered and took a seat. On the chest of drawers facing her stood a huge silver vase containing three dozen red roses—thirty-seven to be exact; she knew this for she had just counted them when the door to the sitting-room opened and a distinguished, rather bald man of about sixty, soberly and very elegantly dressed, came towards her with outstretched hand.

"Miss Hildegard Meisner?"

Hilde nodded with a blush.

"If you'll be good enough to step this way. . . .

As he led her into the sitting-room, Hilde smiled, reassured and secretly delighted. Though he was no longer young, he was decidedly attractive.

"Miss Meisner, I'm delighted to welcome you to France. But forgive me, perhaps you don't speak French."

"Oh yes. Quite well. And English."

"That's splendid. Won't you sit down?"

He offered her a chair and walked round a large marquetry table covered with files and several telephones.

"Have you been in France before, Miss Meisner?"

"No, I've never been out of Germany. Actually, I've never left Hamburg."

"A lovely city. But the war damage was shocking. Did you lose your entire family in the bombing?"

"Yes, my father and mother, and my married sister and her baby."

"I'm so very sorry. Did your brother-in-law manage to survive?"

"Yes," Hilde said with a bitter smile. "Julius lived to see the death of his wife and son. In the same bombing he lost his two chief reasons for living. Later he was reported killed on the Western front—a hero, as they always told the families."

"How appalling it all is. So you're alone in the world?"

"As far as one possibly can be."

"And you have no men friends?"

"None."

He brought out a gold cigarette case and offered her a cigarette which he lit with a gold lighter.

"May I ask you, Miss Meisner, how you make your living?"

"I do translations for a publisher. There are various ways of starving, you know."

"Oh, very good."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it."

"Forgive me, it was only a manner of speaking."

They smiled at each other.

"Won't you have a glass of port?"

She nodded and he opened the door of a cocktail cabinet and filled two glasses from a cut-glass decanter. As he handed her one, he looked her in the eyes and smiled again. She did not dare to drink for she felt that he was about to propose a toast.

"To the future," he said. He had not said "to our future" but she drank all the same.

"Do you know, my dear girl, why I chose yours from all the letters I received?"

"Luck, perhaps. . . ."

"Certainly not. It was your remarkable frankness. Wealth, particularly international wealth, gives a man a sixth sense which tells him at once when he is being exploited."

Hilde fidgeted a little on her chair.

"Most of the women who replied thought they were being clever in not making any illusion to the money involved. Others mentioned it, of course, but saved face by stipulating a husband who must be young, handsome and ready to love them."

He paused for a moment, twisted his glass thoughtfully and went on, "That is why your letter struck me at once. You approached the financial problem with a most engaging lack of hypocrisy, and you understood perfectly that one never gives something for nothing. I realized at once that you were not at all like these other women."

He gave a courteous little bow.

"Well, my dear young lady, now that we've broken the ice, perhaps you'll tell me what you expect from this marriage."

Hilde stammered, "I . . . I What you proposed. I mean luxury, an enjoyable life and travel."

"To what lengths would you go to obtain money, Miss Meisner?"

"What a strange question. I don't imagine that you've brought me all this way to ask me my conditions, but rather to state yours."

"That's a good answer. But I still wish to ask questions. Your letter gave me to understand that you would accept any kind of . . . shall we say compromise?"

"Yes. I want to live a real life. I no longer want the months to have only ten days."

"Ten days . . . ?"

"That's about the length of time each month I don't have to wrestle with the problem of how to pay the rent or buy a new pair of shoes. I subscribed to that weekly paper years ago entirely in the hope of a change. Now that your advertisement offers it to me nothing, absolutely nothing, seems too forbidding if I can obtain what I want."

There was a long silence.

"Of course," she went on at last, "I'm quite wrong to talk to you

like this. I'm lacking in the most elementary diplomacy. And when I look at you I begin to feel anxious. Since you have charm, I imagine that something is very wrong."

He burst out laughing and she looked at him with surprise.

"You are intelligent and quite perspicacious," he said. "Miss Meisner, I suppose that you would like to be married?"

"Why, yes, and I must admit very sincerely that I never for one moment hoped for a husband like you."

"And you were quite right not to hope for such a thing, for I shall not be your husband."

"What do you mean? What kind of joke is this?"

"Sit down, please. There's no point in getting angry. It takes quite a bit of doing to marry a millionaire. You seem to have a lot of aptitude for it, but even that is not enough."

"And where is this mysterious fiancé?"

"We'll talk about him later. At the moment we have a much more important question to settle."

Hilde looked at him, bewildered.

"Miss Meisner, I have been testing you, and you seem to be exactly the person I am looking for. You must not take it amiss if for the present I preserve my anonymity and that of your husband-to-be. The man whose secretary and right arm I have been for years possesses one of the world's great fortunes. He is a childless widower, elderly, sick, and of a difficult and eccentric nature. Financially, my position has been enviable, but I have exhausted myself in this man's service—renouncing my personal life to devote myself to his, putting up with his whims, swallowing his insults. In fact, what I have done for him I would have done for no one else. But I am no altruist and I expected a reward. Knowing myself indispensable, I have waited for it peacefully. Now I find that there is every chance of my being frustrated. My employer has recently made a will. I was lucky enough to learn of this and to see the amount of my legacy.

"I am sixty-two, Miss Meisner, and I have spent more than twenty years of my life in the service of an ingrate. Almost his entire fortune will be used to endow charitable foundations bearing his name. He is cynically indifferent to the future of the world, but only in this way can he achieve immortality. I have carefully considered how I could alter

the course of events. There is only one way, and that is why I inserted this advertisement."

Hilde listened attentively, without making a movement.

"I know him well and I know how to handle him. If you do everything I tell you, most scrupulously, I will make your fortune."

"And why should you do that?"

He smiled and switched on the desk light.

"Because, in order to make my own, I am obliged to make yours. At his age a clever woman can upset his whole life—if she works with me. This man is a misanthrope, and above all he hates women—particularly the wealthy women of his own world. By yourself you could do nothing with him. I alone know how to install you as his wife."

"And once installed, what do I have to do for you?"

"You must not forget that you are his wife thanks to me, and you must show me your gratitude better than he has done."

"What do you mean?"

"Let us talk figures. If he dies now my legacy is twenty thousand dollars. Don't look at me with such surprise. I know it's a lot of money—for you, not for him or for me. If he marries you, there will eventually be a new will, and you will be his sole heiress. I want you to give me on his death, in addition to my legacy, the sum I expected to inherit—two hundred thousand dollars. I will be in luck, and you will be living in a fairy-tale."

"But perhaps he'll live another ten years."

"He's already seventy-three. Besides, you are going to be fabulously rich. You can easily put up with him for six months, a year . . . or even ten years."

"But why do you give up the great part of this fortune to me?"

"I want only what I have counted on for years. With that I'll have more than enough for a comfortable old age. What do you think?"

"I really don't know what to say."

"No, of course not. I want you to think over what I've just told you and give me your reply tomorrow."

He stood up and Hilde realized that the interview was over. "Shall we say the same time and the same place tomorrow?"

"Why, yes."

"I'm delighted to have made your acquaintance, Miss Meisner."

Three

THE FOLLOWING morning Hilde gave her dresses to the maid to press, had her hair done and bought some shoes at a smart shop. A new life seemed to be beginning. Not having slept a wink, she had had plenty of time to think things over, and she was rather pleased that they had turned out as they had.

When she went to the suite to keep her appointment, her host, wearing a grey tweed suit, seemed younger than the day before. The light sun tan, which she had not noticed until now, showed off his blue eyes to advantage. He smiled and offered her a chair.

"Did you have a good night?" he asked.

"Actually I didn't sleep. I kept thinking about all you told me."

"And what conclusion have you reached?"

"Marriage without objections." She laughed a trifle nervously and went on, "Unless there are any objections on your side."

"I'm delighted by your decision. And now, Miss Meisner, have you a solicitor who looks after your affairs?"

"Heavens, no. What should I do with one? I have no 'affairs' except the one in hand, and I don't even know a solicitor."

"I see." He balanced the pencil he was holding between his fingers.

"What documents concerning yourself do you have?"

"Just my identity and ration cards, I'm afraid."

"But in order to marry you will have to produce at least a birth certificate. And we'll need it quickly."

"I think that may be quite difficult. The heavy bombing destroyed all the government offices and most of the records in Hamburg."

"That's so, of course. Still, there are certain official forms we can fill in at once." He took a file from the drawer of his desk.

"Miss Meisner," he said, tapping it with the palm of his hand, "since you are an orphan, I propose to adopt you."

Hilde looked completely stupefied. "I beg your pardon?"

"I'm going to adopt you. Legally you will be my daughter. What do you think of that?" And with his hands folded on the file, he smiled at her.

Hilde tried to collect her thoughts. She said distractedly, "It's very generous of you and . . ."

"No, don't misunderstand me. I'm not a philanthropist, I'm a businessman. I'm gambling on you, but I must have my guarantees."

"Forgive me, I don't quite understand."

"You are just the girl I need because you are prepared to do anything for money, but that, in itself, is a double-edged weapon. I don't doubt your present sincerity. I know that so long as you are not married I can count on you. But afterwards . . . ?"

Hilde was speechless.

"It would be the easiest thing in the world to persuade an elderly husband that his young wife was being subjected to unwelcome attentions from his secretary. And then what would become of the secretary?"

"I would never do such a thing! And how will the fact of adopting me be a guarantee?"

"Just think for a moment and you'll see. A father couldn't be suspect. Of course I have no intention of publicizing the adoption; it's a joker I'm keeping up my sleeve in case you happen to forget the rules."

Hilde leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs. "Don't think that I'm opposed to the idea. I'm rather surprised, that's all. And when," she asked coolly, "shall I see my future husband?"

"Not until you're a little more presentable. You are a pretty woman, but you must learn to arrange your hair, to make up, to dress, to walk, to chatter of everything and nothing—of Stock Exchange quotations; of international politics; of race-horses. A whole education, Miss Meisner, but the role of *Pygmalion* is always tempting to a man of my age. In the meantime, I want to settle all the small details with you."

"I'll do exactly as you wish."

"Good. Now, if you will take my place at this desk I should like to dictate a letter to you."

"To whom?"

"To myself; a letter in your own handwriting which I shall use only if you deny me the two hundred thousand dollars you are to give me on your husband's death."

"But I agreed to that yesterday."

"Yes, of course; this is only a confirmation in writing which will be



my guarantee if you happen to forget. Actually, it's not binding for the present, because you'll have to sign it with your future married name. Once you come into the fortune and I have the money, I shall hand you back the letter."

Hilde stood up and he took her by the shoulders. Holding her facing him for a brief instant, he said, "You must have absolute confidence in me, the sort of confidence I displayed in you yesterday when I showed my hand. We are partners in this business. If you doubt it or try to outplay me, I should rather our relationship ended here. No one is irreplaceable. There are other young women."

"What am I to write?"

He took out a large sheet of smooth note-paper, handed her a fountain-pen and began to pace up and down in front of the table.

"Dear Father . . ."

Hilde lowered her head and wrote at his dictation:

I enclose a cheque for two hundred thousand dollars. This is in settlement of all accounts. I give it to you because my husband is dead. It will, I hope, set your conscience at rest.

Hilde raised her head.

"I don't understand the meaning of the last sentence."

"One must try to make it sound logical. If your husband dies, it is only natural that being your father I should wish to obtain a little more than my legacy of twenty thousand dollars and perhaps feel guilty about it."

"Go on, please."

He continued to dictate.

Everything that has happened will be effaced by time, and this money will enable you to live pleasantly in the meanwhile.

Your affectionate daughter,
Hildegard Korff Richmond

"There, now you know your two future names. I am Anton Korff. After you are married and have your private bank account you will give me the cheque, and I will hold that too. For the moment, address the envelope to me so that there can be no possible confusion."

He dictated a New York address and then he said, "Thank you, Miss Meisner. Now just sign these adoption papers."

"You've thought out everything, I see."

"Naturally."

Hilde signed some typed pages and without looking at him asked, "Are you German by any chance?"

"From Hamburg. I wanted a compatriot to have a chance like this."

"Are you married?"

"No. I'm offering you a father, not a family."

"And what do I have to do now?"

"Get ready. Buy dresses, perfume, cosmetics; I don't suppose I need give a woman any advice on that subject. If you need more money, just let me know. Ah, one more thing: Mr. Richmond hates green. Remember that."

And Hilde duly remembered it as she bought herself a trousseau fit for a princess. She soon realized that a woman only needed to be smartly dressed for people to turn round as she passed.

Her naturally beautiful hair was restyled by a skilled hairdresser, who created a distinguished and original coiffure for her. She had a manicure twice a week, bought her perfume from Rochas and her dresses from Dior.

Her new life had begun. Every evening she dined in suite 306 alone with Anton Korff, who put the finishing touches to her education.

Hilde was a talented pupil. She quickly learned how to converse with a man of the world. She learned the rules of baccarat and was initiated into the mysteries of the Stock Exchange.

She rarely went out in the afternoon.

"No one must know you," Anton said to her. "Carl Richmond must be allowed to think that he discovered you . . . he must be bowled over at first sight."

"And suppose I do not succeed in doing so?" asked Hildegard anxiously.

"Then you will have to return to Hamburg and carry on with your translations."

Day after day, he slowly moulded her as he desired. There was no question of fashioning her intelligence. Anton Korff had plenty of his own; it was quite sufficient for both of them.

Four

INSTALLED in his wheel-chair in the dining-saloon of his yacht, *Lucky*, Carl Richmond was ranting because he had no cigars left. Tugging at the wheels, he steered himself away from the table and vented his wrath upon three Jamaicans, in pale blue livery. They accepted his insults philosophically. The flow of invective was running its invariable course, and now he was coming to the part about himself, the poor, misunderstood millionaire.

"Good-for-nothings! You're waiting for me to die so that you can feast on my corpse like vultures. But you won't get a penny. I won't leave any money to faithless brutes like you. I'm ill, do you hear? I must have peace and quiet and not be thwarted. The doctor said I mustn't be thwarted."

His anger made him bawl like a madman.

"Get to hell out of here and leave me alone. I'm used to it. Nobody bothers about me, because I'm old. But I'm rich. And you'll continue to serve me whether you want to or not. Now send me the captain."

The three negroes bowed and went out in single file.

Left alone, Carl Richmond wheeled himself to the connecting bathroom, where he sprayed himself with scent and combed his hair in front of the mirror. He was a little anxious, because his left eye had been discharging for two days, and he grimaced into the glass, revealing a set of unnecessarily yellow false teeth; when he wheeled himself back to the saloon, the captain was waiting.

The officer, cap beneath his arm, stood to attention. "You sent for me, sir?"

"When do we get to Cannes?"

"In two days at the latest."

"Have you a message for me?"

"No, sir."

"I don't know why I have a wireless on board. Nobody ever bothers about me. Is there nothing from Anton Korff?"

"Not for three days, sir."

"I need a specialist for my eye. I want the best specialist in Europe!

Tell me frankly—is it more inflamed than yesterday? Come closer, man. I'm not infectious."

Irritably, he wheeled the chair against the captain's legs.

The captain bent down and examined the eye. "I think there's more discharge, if that's what you mean, sir."

"Do you think it's serious?"

"I'm not competent to judge, sir."

"Go to blazes!"

"Certainly, sir." The captain turned on his heel, put on his cap and went out without looking back.

The bored paralytic did not know what to do. That was his tragedy—to struggle desperately to kill time and then to curse the fact that it was gone. He wheeled himself to the ward-room where his game of patience was waiting for him.

The whole ship had been built round the infirmity which confined him to his wheel-chair. The port-holes had been replaced by picture windows so that he could look out at the sea, though he never did. Nor did he often leave the ship when it was in port. He sailed the seas throughout the year because the only thing that pleased him in this life was to be aboard his yacht, among his servants, like a lord on his estate. Nothing which happened in this strange, reduced world escaped his eye. He had his spies, his partisans and above all his enemies, whose hatred alone gave him some reason for existence.

It was good to feel them at his mercy.

And yet Carl Richmond was not really a monster.

A native of Hamburg, a naturalized American for convenience in conducting his business, he had amassed a gigantic fortune—at the outset by a lucky strike of oil on some lands he owned, and later by his cunning in exploiting them. He had always been astute and unscrupulous. These two qualities combined with luck had made things very easy for him.

Nevertheless, he was a lonely figure. Hard on himself, he was even harder with others. He had met Anton Korff, a distant cousin, during a visit to Germany in 1934 and had engaged him as secretary for the duration of that voyage. Richmond had no family affection for Korff, but the man's exceptional qualities had made him useful, and he had kept him in his service ever since.

Korff was an opportunist who wanted his share of the cake. The old man knew this perfectly well and by encouraging the other's ambitions had ensured his lasting devotion. It would be time enough to shatter Korff's illusions when the will was read. That had been a highly entertaining document to draw up and it would cause many surprises. Pity he would not be there to enjoy it.

Money had corrupted the old man. He had discovered its power during his long career. He could buy men of reputed integrity, because he could always afford to double the stakes. Everything could be bought—even consciences, which fetched the highest price on the market.

During his whole life, one person alone had resisted his money: the wife of his youth.

She had married him as though he were penniless, completely disinterested in his fortune and even shocked by it. A shy, ailing woman, she had devoted herself to him, body and soul, with unassuming tenderness and fidelity. Her greatest regret was that she had given him no child.

When he became a widower, Carl Richmond had displayed the only genuine grief ever seen in him, and in the forty years that had passed he had shown no interest in remarrying. Now, old and ill, disgusted and cynical, he was on his way from New York to Cannes, where he would put his European affairs in order and pick up his secretary. Then he would anchor off the Italian Riviera, perhaps go as far as Greece along the Dalmatian coast and swing round to reach Florida by winter. He was in a hurry to get to port in order to get in touch with a specialist. He could not remain perpetually with a handkerchief up to his eye.

And in any case he had to put in somewhere, because he had run out of cigars.

Five

AS SOON as the ship docked Anton Korff went on board alone to test the tyrant's temper and to see how he could best contrive to bring Hilde into the picture.

One of the officers saluted him as he came up the gangway.

Immediately he went below and had himself announced. The old man must be bored, he thought, because he did not keep him waiting.

"Come over here," he said as soon as he saw his secretary, "and tell me exactly what you think of this."

Korff examined the infected eye as briefly as he decently could. "I must get in touch with an eye specialist, sir," he said. "I'll notify Maurey in Lausanne. He can take a plane today and start treatment tomorrow."

"It's lucky you're here. These donkeys would have let me die. I want to see the doctor at once—I have no intention of staying long at Cannes. Try to arrange it as quickly as you can, then bring me back some cigars."

Anton Korff left some papers to be signed, got into his car and was driven back to the hotel. Losing no time, he put a call through to Maurey's clinic in Lausanne. He insisted on speaking personally to the doctor, and then explained to the specialist what he wanted him to do. Korff had just found an official way of introducing Hilde into her position.

An hour later Hilde was in his office.

He looked her over from top to toe. The transformation was incredible. The young woman in front of him might not be particularly beautiful, with her rather hard features, but she had class—a great deal of class.

"Are you ready to meet your fiancé?"

She nodded with a smile.

"I must warn you. He's not a pretty sight at the moment, but that's all the better for you. It will justify your arrival. You will be his nurse."

"His nurse?"

"Yes. He has an inflamed eye, which worries him a great deal. Dr. Maurey is coming tomorrow from Switzerland for a consultation. He will recommend a nurse. We shall scour the town. This holiday period disorganizes everything and of course we shall not find one. We shall let Richmond yell and storm for a day or two to prepare for your entrance. Then you have only to appear to be considered his saviour."

"I must warn you at once that I'm not a nurse."

"So much the better. In actual fact he doesn't need a nurse—just someone to make him behave."

"Yes, but what about his bad eye?"

"The doctor will leave you very accurate instructions. Anyone can put on a dressing. As for the rest, don't worry. He has his private servants for all the menial tasks. You will be the decorative creature who administers his potions and ointments and places a cool hand on his brow from time to time. Do you understand?"

"Not in the least. I don't see why he should decide to marry me if I'm one of his staff."

"That's for me to judge. There is a very simple way of dealing with him. Unfortunately I realized it too late to apply it in my own case."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Keep the upper hand. That's the whole secret. At the first contact you have with him you must control him. If you allow him the slightest advantage over you, you're finished."

"But if I'm his employee and I oppose him, he'll throw me out."

"Nothing of the kind. That's what he's been looking for for years. He's ready to sacrifice everything for someone who will stand up to him with a little human dignity. He will begin by ignoring and insulting you. Don't let him do it and you'll have won."

"Do you really think that's enough to make him fall in love with me?"

"Love doesn't enter the thing at all. He'll play your game and marry you because that's the only way he will be able to feel he has you. Naturally he will try to buy you first and the more you resist the more your value will go up in his eyes. And, most important, when he proposes don't fall into his arms as though it were a dream come true."

"He's a real Prince Charming, isn't he?"

"No, he's a magnate—that's far better."

"Shall I buy myself a uniform?"

"If you like. It will give him confidence in you. But I'd buy some simple dresses, too. A nurse in Dior clothing would seem suspicious."

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I think we've discussed the essentials. I will keep you informed on the rise or fall of your stock once the boat is under way. Good luck, Miss Meisner."

She stood up and they shook hands. Their partnership was now going to become active.

DR. MAUREY was not only a good doctor but a remarkable businessman who ran a scandalously expensive and luxurious clinic. He had quickly realized that bored millionaires were manna from heaven. He and Anton Korff understood one another.

"Well, what is it this time?" he asked Korff as the car took them from the airport to the yacht basin.

"A bad eye," replied Korff. "Looks like conjunctivitis. He wants to get it treated so that we can put out to sea again, though that idea doesn't really thrill me."

"Would you like me to have him put under observation here?"

"No, that won't be necessary. I'm bringing along some distraction—a nurse."

The dignified mask of the great specialist fell, to be replaced by a jovial, understanding smile.

"I haven't seen her yet, but I hope she'll be pretty," said Anton Korff with a laugh. "At any rate there'll be a woman on board."

The doctor's examination of Richmond lasted a good hour. Anton Korff was ordered to find a nurse and the invalid was banished to his cabin, to be looked after by his Jamaicans until a competent person arrived.

Two days went by with no sign of a nurse. The old man was livid with rage. He decided to put out for Nice in the hope of finding someone there.

Then, as though by a miracle, the person everyone was looking for appeared.

As Hilde reached the top of the gangway, elegant and self-possessed, all the men on board stared at her.

She went up to the second officer and told him that the Tourist Information Bureau had recommended her, and was immediately taken to the invalid.

Richmond dismissed his servants, drove his wheel-chair towards her as hard as he could and asked her if she were not slightly out of her mind to make him wait two torturous days.

Erect and impassive, Hilde looked him up and down, and said calmly, "In the summer the Côte is crowded with people and I have all the work I want. I can choose my patients. If you are as unpleasant as you look, say so now and I can make other plans."

Carl Richmond's surprise made him drop the towel which he held screwed up in a ball over his eye. "Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I was with a young woman in labour. I went this morning to the Tourist Information Bureau where they gave me a list of people in need of my services. As you happened to be the first on the list I came here."

"But don't you know who I am?"

"Carl Richmond, of course. It was written down."

"But don't you know that I'm a multimillionaire?"

"What of it?"

"It's more worth your while to look after me than to bother about some little middle-class mother."

"Now, really! I am paid at union rates."

"But, you little hypocrite, you know perfectly well that I shall pay you ten times more than the others do."

"Certainly not, Mr. Richmond."

"You're honest, I suppose?"

"No—far-seeing, that's all," she replied. "I'm not going to give you that little advantage so that you'll think you can ride rough-shod over me. You'll pay me what the others do, and you'll behave as they do, or I shall go to the next person on the list. Do we understand each other, Mr. Richmond?"

The old man looked at her consideringly.

"Odd girl," he muttered as he pivoted in his chair away from her. "Well, now that you're here, attend to me."

"That's what I'm going to do. Where are the doctor's instructions?"

"My secretary will give them to you. Have you a name or do I have to whistle for you?"

"My name is Hildegard Meisner."

"A German name?"

"I am a German from Hamburg."

"I like that—we'll speak German."

Facing the picture window without taking his eyes off her reflection in the glass he said, "Tell me about Hamburg. I haven't been there since 1934."

And Hilde, astonished by this, told herself he would be easy to handle because he was sentimental.

Six

FEW HOURS later, leaning on the rail next to Anton Korff, she watched the harbour of Cannes slowly disappear into the darkness. They were bound for Portofino, on the Italian Riviera.

"You did well," Korff said. "He mentioned you."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, nothing special. You're still under observation. But the first impression was good. Before I forget, try to stop him smoking. Dr. Maurey is anxious that he shouldn't. And remember when you play chess with him to let him win. Not every time of course. He'd notice that. But quite often."

"He's only an old spoiled sentimental child. Do you know that I had to speak to him about Hamburg for an hour?"

"Let me set you straight if you are under the impression that he listened to you out of sentimentality. He was checking up on your background—he told me so."

Hilde stared at the sea for a moment and then said, "Well, maybe I prefer him that way."

Life aboard the *Lucky* slowly settled down. Hilde, who had never set foot on board ship before, was thrilled by this floating palace. Her cabin was a masterpiece of comfort and good taste. She rose early every morning, walked the deck, took her breakfast with the officers and then sun-bathed in the stern. Slightly before midday she visited Carl Richmond, who had just got up. She changed his dressing and gossiped as she gave him a manicure.

He had asked her to do this, although she wasn't particularly skilful. It was mostly an excuse to keep her near him, without admitting that her company gave him pleasure.

That morning, while he was dipping his hands in the soapy water, he concealed a smile and said in honeyed tones, "Do you know what you're going to do, young lady? You're going to give me the key you have in your pocket for a few minutes."

"And what do you intend to do with it?"

He made a funny little noise which she took for a laugh.

"I want to take something out of the cupboard."

"A cigar, I suppose?"

"You're too inquisitive, my dear. Listen, I'll make a bargain with you. You give me the key and I'll give you a nice new hundred-dollar bill."

"You know perfectly well that the doctor has forbidden you to smoke."

"But I didn't say I was going to get a cigar."

"You didn't say so, but that's what you have in mind."

"Think it over, my dear. It will be a secret between us, and you can do whatever you like with that hundred-dollar bill."

"It's useless, Mr. Richmond. You're wasting your time."

The old man exploded. "You little fool! If you don't give me the key I'll call one of the boys and make him break open the cupboard. I shall have the cigars and you won't get a cent."

"Just as you like."

He stared at her. Then with an abrupt gesture he pivoted his chair and wheeled it away. Opening a cupboard he took out a large box, placed it on his knees and returned to Hilde. She watched him without the flicker of an eyelid.

From his waistcoat pocket he extracted a long chain with a key on it. Placing it in the lock, he turned it and raised the lid, watching the young woman out of the corner of his eye.

The box was lined with plush and contained a mass of sparkling jewels. There were bracelets and rings, necklaces of gold and platinum set with precious stones.

"Choose, my dear."

Hilde stared, fascinated.

"What would you like? A ring, a bracelet, a clip?"

Before she could reply he brandished a great square ruby ring. "Here—take it. I give it to you."

Hilde took it for a moment between her fingers and let the red fires play in the light. "What a marvellous stone," she whispered.

"I brought it back from Burma where the best ones come from."

She raised her head and caught his eye. Then she quietly replaced the ring in the box and said with a smile:

"I didn't realize you liked smoking that much. I'm very sorry."

With a brusque gesture he banged down the lid, locked the box and replaced the key in his pocket.

Then he said contemptuously, "You're aware, I hope, that you're in my employ?"

"You give me very little opportunity to forget it."

"Well, I order you—do you hear—to go and fetch me the cigars."

"This is a ridiculous farce, Mr. Richmond. You have engaged me, but I take my orders from Dr. Maurey and if I carry them out it's only in your interest."

"So you refuse?"

"Yes, I do."

"Get out. I don't want to see any more of you. I don't want to hear your name. You're fired!"

Hilde, a little bewildered, hesitated.

"Get out, I tell you."

"You mustn't get in a rage, Mr. Richmond," she said as she rose to leave. "At your age the years count double."

She was in disgrace until the following day. Carl Richmond kept to his cabin, attended by his Jamaicans, and did not send for her.

She saw him next at his own table. That night he invited everyone to dine with him—that is to say, Anton Korff, the captain, the second officer and herself.

He was wearing a malicious smile, and his good eye sparkled ironically as it scrutinized them each in turn. Though the dinner was well chosen and the wines admirable, the atmosphere was strained. Everyone was on guard.

At the end of the meal, Hilde understood what the old man was up to.

When the coffee and liqueurs were brought in, he took a cigar from his pocket, bit off the end and spat it out without taking his eyes off her. As he lit up he remarked, "You were quite right to refuse, my dear child. It cost me a lot less than if I had got it from you." He took out a crocodile cigar case and showed it to her. It contained ten Havanas. "Well, Miss Meisner, don't you regret yesterday's integrity?"

She smiled at him, and without raising her voice replied, "Do you know, Mr. Richmond, why Dr. Maurey made me promise not to let you smoke?"

She waited a moment to give him time to reply. But the reply did not come.

"In his written instructions," she went on, "he maintained that a cigar for a man of your age is the equivalent of a month of your life. Personally I think it very brave of you to squander so small a capital."

There was a heavy silence. Anton Korff stared at his plate to hide the gleam of amusement in his eyes. The two officers, ill at ease, busied themselves with their coffee; Hilde looked the old man straight in the eyes.

Carl Richmond brought his fist down with a bang on the table, making the glasses rattle. A drop of red wine stained the damask tablecloth.

"You are a fool," he raged, "a stupid little fool."

"But a young one, Mr. Richmond, still very young. . . ." With a smile she got up from the table and calmly left the dining-saloon. The other guests, completely impassive, did not even turn their heads to watch her go.

As soon as the door closed behind her, she realized that she was trembling, and she wondered if she had gone too far. Leaning on the rail, she waited for her inner calm to return. She did not hear the captain join her. His voice made her start.

"If you'll allow me to give you a word of advice, mademoiselle, be careful. The old man doesn't care much for being made a fool of in public." He walked away without waiting for her reply.

The sea moaned gently, the air was cool and the night was soft. Hilde suddenly wondered what she was doing on this yacht. She had been such a short time away from her own drab world.

The little flat loomed up in her memory and then the whole preceding period—the bombing, which had left its indelible mark on her life as a woman; the rats in the chaos of streets turned to rubble; the constant fear, hunger, cold and loneliness; the incredible survival of ordinary habits at fixed times such as sleep under a ragged blanket, regular meals from a battered tin; the hours of walking in search of a kilo of potatoes, a faggot of dry wood, shelter. . . . It was in this way, in the shell of a building, surrounded by twisted iron, by refuse and burst drains and yawning windows, that she had found love.

The man was a German soldier. He was a member of an army in

retreat. He was tired and hungry, and hardly aware any longer of the reason for his tattered uniform. With rifle and haversack slung across his back, bareheaded, his fair hair streaked with dust, the debris tumbling under his feet—that is how he had suddenly appeared in her corner of the ruins, making little landslides as he walked.

Hilde had shared with him a sort of stew which she heated over a makeshift fire.

The boy had wolfed the food in silence and then, since they might die from one minute to the next, since nothing bound them to their past and they seemed to have no future, they had made love. They had exchanged the best of themselves, their passionate youth, their tenderness, their sweetness; they gave each other all that remained of life and strength. The boy had left the following morning while she was still asleep.

Such had been their portion.

The sea moaned gently, the air was cool, the night was soft and the young woman suddenly felt that she was a hundred years old. . . . A sailor came up to her, put a finger to his cap and told her that Carl Richmond wanted her for a game of chess.

All at once she was back in the present. She decided that it might be a good idea to let the old man win this game. Then she followed the sailor.

Chess, after all, was only a pastime. The game they were playing in real life was far more thrilling and each day brought its gains.

Since Hilde liked Portofino, they remained there two days, and while she went ashore the old man kept to his bed.

Anton Korff had to admit that she had been successful. "You are a very talented pupil," he said to her as they were drinking tea at a restaurant overlooking the sea.

"I follow your lessons, that's all."

"You do better than that, you have initiative and poise. You're perfectly capable of bringing this off."

"I'm glad he's not harmless. It would have distressed me to abuse his confidence."

"But you would have done it all the same."

Hilde stared into space and shrugged her shoulders. "To be truthful, I don't really know," she said.

Seven

AFTER THEY left Portofino, Carl Richmond saw fit to be quite odious for several days. Hilde avoided him as much as possible, but the explosion came while they were in a Sicilian harbour.

It all began with a ridiculous episode concerning a casserole of chicken.

Hilde was now planning the meals. Knowing the old man's exacting culinary tastes she indulged them tactfully, and he was very appreciative of her efforts. Yet one day, despite his aversion to it, she decided to have chicken with mushroom sauce, which she particularly liked. She took care at the same time to order Richmond one of his favourite fish dishes.

The luncheon, at which they were all assembled, went off well until the moment when the steward brought in the chicken. Then the old man's amazement swiftly gave place to an uncontrolled outburst of anger. The hold which Hilde had acquired over him had begun to seem a threat to his liberty, and the fact that she flouted his tastes at his own table was intolerable.

He rang for one of the boys while his guests began to serve themselves. White as a sheet, he did not take his eyes off the girl. Avoiding his stare, Hilde used all her will power to prevent her hands from trembling.

The Jamaican came in.

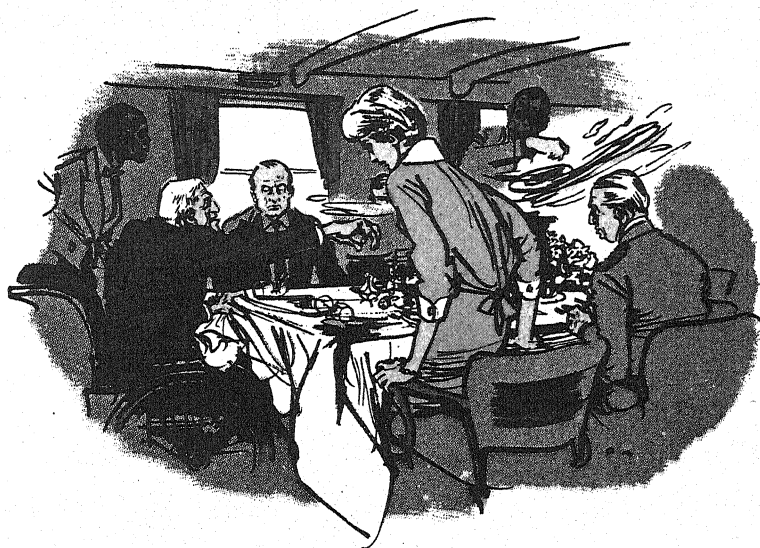
"Clear that away," Richmond said in an even tone.

The officers and Anton Korff let their food be removed. Hilde did not look up when the coloured man put out a gloved hand for her plate. All that could be heard was her deep but curiously vibrant voice asking for a little sauce. There was a deathly silence. Confused, the Jamaican turned to his employer for orders.

"I loathe chicken, Miss Meisner, as you know full well. I cannot allow it to be eaten at my table."

Hilde looked up at him.

"Have you never asked yourself if it is pleasant for us to put up with your stupid culinary whims? I ordered a fish for you which you like.



Enjoy it, and we will enjoy our chicken. But don't make a ridiculous scene about it."

They stared at each other and the girl realized that this time she had overplayed her hand.

For a moment they were all frozen in their places. Then Carl Richmond's face turned from a muddy white to magenta. Seizing the carafe of red wine he flung it against the starboard bulkhead. The crystal broke and a red stream trickled down the panelling. Then, before anyone could stop him, he seized the plates at random and flung them at the walls. One hit the Jamaican servant full in the face. He fled to the deck.

Anton Korff half rose as the old man, in a towering rage, grabbed everything within reach and sent it crashing.

"So you think you can lay down the law here, do you? No one, do you understand, no one can disobey me. When I forbid something I expect my orders to be carried out. I pay you to obey me. I have the money. I am the master. You're a lackey in my service, just like the others, and I won't allow you to forget it."

Hilde, who was on the point of collapse, got up from the table and left the saloon despite an infuriated order from Carl Richmond to sit down.

On the empty deck, she saw the Jamaican, the one she had heard called John Thomas, by the rail. His head was bent and his shoulders shook as if he were sobbing silently.

We're alike, she thought bitterly. We have traded our dignity for security. Impulsively she went to the man and placed her hand on his arm.

"Don't you mind," Hilde said. "He is old and ill and bitter. Here, take this. Perhaps it will help."

She took some money from her handbag and offered it to him.

He shook his head. "No, madam. You have treated me like a human being. You have touched me with your hand. That is enough." He walked away.

Hilde took a deep breath of the fresh, sweet air. Then, almost as though she were in a trance, she went to her cabin. Without stopping to think, obeying only her instincts, she threw a few things in a suitcase. As she hurried down the gangway and left the yacht, one of the officers on deck glanced at her curiously.

On the quayside the sun beat down furiously. Somewhere a radio blared out a love song. Hilde crossed a square, deserted except for some sleeping dogs, and made for a café under the palms. She entered the cool saloon, stumbled against a case of Coca-Cola and found the proprietor, wearing a dirty jersey, lunching in the back room. When she asked him where she could find a taxi, he looked her up and down, and said in very bad English that he would drive her himself.

An old lorry stood outside the café. He put in her suitcase and opened the door of the cab for her. They jerked off in a cloud of dust and presently pulled up at the only hotel in the place where she could possibly stay. He stuffed the bank-note she gave him into his pocket, handed down her suitcase and drove off without a word.

All the porters were taking their siestas and no one came out to carry her bag. She had twisted her ankle on the gravelled path before she reached the deserted lobby. There was a call bell on the reception desk. She pressed it, and heard it echo faintly among the potted palms.

After a while, a clerk appeared, his face puffy with sleep. When she had registered he led her up a wide marble staircase and down a long corridor to a large bedroom. It had a pretty terrace overlooking the bay where the *Lucky* was rocking gently.

As soon as she was alone Hilde took off her shoes, lit a cigarette and lay down on the bed. She closed her eyes and relived the scene on the yacht, realizing at last the mess she had got herself into. But she knew that anyone with an ounce of self-respect would have done what she had done.

On board the *Lucky* Carl Richmond had himself wheeled to his cabin after his outburst. His fits of rage always left him unresentful, hungry and, in general, happy to be alive. Moreover, he was pleased to have had the last word.

In another cabin Anton Korff considered the situation. This time his pupil had obviously overstepped the mark, and her running away, which he had just been informed of, would be difficult to undo. There was only one course of action: he must go and find her before the old man heard of her disappearance.

Without much enthusiasm he made his way down the gangway and visited the only café in the square. There he questioned the owner, who drove him to Hilde's hotel.

She received him in her room. Impeccable as usual, a carnation in his buttonhole, Korff looked at her sourly. "I think, my dear, that you've just committed a rather dangerous blunder."

Hilde made no reply.

"Carl Richmond doesn't yet know that you've gone. We must get back to the ship before everything is ruined."

"I have no intention of returning aboard."

There was a long silence. At last Korff spoke.

"May I point out that you'll be stranded in a foreign country without money, visa or labour permit? I suppose you've already thought out some interesting solution."

"No, but I can't return after what's happened."

"Is it pride or strategy?"

"Don't let's quibble over words. I can't put up with the old man any longer, that's all."

"But, my dear girl, do you think you can become a millionairess without a little effort? Didn't I tell you that at the start?"

Hilde sat up straighter, considering his words.

"You're perfectly right, of course," she said at last. "I acted on impulse. But the blunder is not irreparable. Suppose I use this disappearing

act to whet the old man's interest? You return to the ship. Don't mention me, and see how things stand. If he hasn't missed me yet I'll return during the day; otherwise put him on my trail and I'll play my own hand."

Anton Korff stood up, but he looked doubtful.

"It's dangerous," he said, "but there's no other solution. Let's hope he doesn't give orders to set sail suddenly."

Hilde smiled.

"I think that he'll have a little trouble with the harbour authorities for allowing me to land without permission."

"I'm astounded at your talents, my dear."

Anton Korff left without another word. It was a risky game. The outcome now rested entirely on the unpredictable reactions of the old eccentric.

On the *Lucky* Anton Korff went to his office and picked up a bundle of files. With these under his arm he knocked on his employer's door. On entering he was surprised to see that the old man was almost affable.

"We shall leave this evening for Split," he said, smiling. "Look after everything."

The secretary cautiously felt his way over dangerous ground.

"Have you given orders to the captain, sir, or shall I attend to it?"

"No, that's all in order. Have a game of chess with me. Apparently we can't take on fresh water until five o'clock."

They sat down at the chess-board and began to play. The old man kept watching his secretary. After a while he said, "Miss Meisner is not in her cabin."

Without taking his eyes from the board, Anton Korff said non-committally, "I'm not surprised, in this heat."

The old man gave a little gurgle of satisfaction. He was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"I mean she's not on board. An officer saw her leave carrying a suit-case."

"She's probably gone for a stroll."

"With a suit-case? My dear Korff, I gave you credit for more intelligence than that. She's gone for good. She's left us. Do you know that she's rather a remarkable young person?"

The secretary felt the old man's eyes on him. He made his move on the chess-board and shrugged his shoulders.

"I can always find you another nurse."

"I don't want another. I want her. She's a member of my staff and she won't leave except with my permission. I hate insubordination. Go and find her and we'll put her ashore at Split."

"She might refuse to come with me, sir."

"Why are you so unhelpful, Korff? You seem delighted she's gone."

"I am, sir, to a certain extent. I find that she has an exaggerated idea of her duties, if you'll allow me to say so."

"That's precisely why I want her back. She's got to understand once and for all that I am the only one to make decisions."

They finished their game of chess and Anton Korff, not wishing to spoil his employer's good humour, let him win.

Then he went back to the hotel and informed Hilde of Richmond's orders. Since the old man wanted her back only to sack her ruthlessly, they decided that Hilde would have to stick to her guns. On his return to the ship Korff told his employer that the nurse refused to remain in his service and did not even ask for her wages.

Carl Richmond shook his head, looked at his secretary with half-closed eyes and said quietly, "Between ourselves, Korff, did you offer her any inducement to return?"

"Certainly, sir."

"How much?"

"I didn't mention a figure. I merely let it be understood."

"And did she refuse?"

"I think she made it a point of honour."

"Well, she can go to hell. I don't want to hear any more about her. We'll weigh anchor as soon as we have the water aboard."

Anton Korff returned to his cabin deep in thought. The game was in the balance. If Carl Richmond made no move, the whole plan would collapse like a house of cards. Hilde would be out of the running. He would have to find another pupil and train her. But that was no longer possible, he suddenly thought with horror; the papers making her his daughter were now officially in order. It was too late to start all over again. From whatever angle he approached the puzzle it seemed insoluble.

Towards five o'clock he realized they had begun to take on water but he forced himself to remain in his cabin. He had just given up hope when the unexpected happened.

Carl Richmond summoned him. The hollow feeling in his stomach vanished as soon as he saw the old man. He had on his best clothes—alpaca jacket and Panama hat.

"I wish to call on Miss Meisner."

The secretary was careful to be non-committal.

"I'll get a car, sir."

Almost speechless, he went up on deck. Everything had turned out all right. The girl had been right to be high-handed. It was incredible. . . . Once the old man began to give way he was finished.

It was a difficult task to get the invalid in his wheel-chair into the back of the café owner's lorry and to lash the chair securely. When it was done Richmond refused to let his secretary accompany him. "I'll manage with the driver," he said.

Once more the Sicilian drove to the hotel. Carl Richmond smiled quietly to himself as they went along. He had regained a little faith in humanity and was quite overcome by it.

It needed three of the hotel staff to get him and his chair out of the lorry. He had himself wheeled into the garden and there, in the shade of a clump of trees, he waited patiently for Hilde.

She wished neither to be too eager nor to seem to rub in her victory by keeping him waiting. She groomed herself carefully before going down to join him. He smiled as she approached and motioned her to a chair. "Do you realize, Miss Meisner, that it was quite a sporting venture for me to come and look for you here?"

"I'm very sorry that you felt obliged to do so."

"Well, that's enough joking. I never play the gallant. I'm not one. But I like clear-cut situations, and I want to settle this one. You are in my employ, and I gave you no orders to leave it."

Hilde smiled. "I thought my departure had taken care of that."

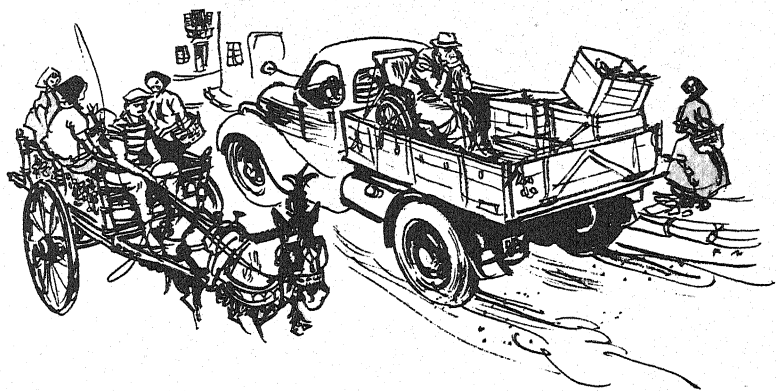
"Your flight has caused me a good deal of inconvenience, and yet, on the other hand, I have for you a certain . . . how shall I put it . . . consideration. Yes, that's it. You haven't the slave mentality of the people who surround me. That's why I'm here." He looked at her for a moment. She remained silent.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Miss Meisner. We are weighing anchor as soon as I get back. I offer you ten thousand dollars to forget this incident. Go and fetch your suit-case and come with me."

"It's not as simple as that, Mr. Richmond."

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

"It's the incident I regret, Mr. Richmond. And I'm afraid it may be repeated."



"I'm offering you fifteen thousand dollars to forget it. What more can I do?" She heard the throaty sound, like laughter.

"Merely apologize."

"Oh, I see." The old man was stupefied.

"Perhaps that's a currency that has no value in your world."

"Wait a moment. You're not sincere. You couldn't be. No one in their senses would prefer a forced apology to fifteen thousand dollars. What are you up to? What do you really want?"

"An apology, I've told you."

"Suppose I accept this explanation and apologize. Then what?"

"Nothing. I shall forget the incident and carry on with my job."

The old man swivelled his wheel-chair without taking his eyes off Hilde. "But why do you want a man of my age to apologize to a chit of a girl like you? From pride?"

"Certainly not. Call it self-respect, if you like."

"Rubbish. That's a word you only find in the dictionary, like liberty or equality."

"Not for everyone, Mr. Richmond. You should stop thinking that the whole world is modelled on your pattern."

"It's like a breath of youth being with you, my young friend, and I must admit that from time to time it has its charms."

Hilde concealed a little smile of triumph.

"So, as I understand it, when I have no further use for your services I shall pay you off at union rates and give you a second-class ticket home?"

"Why, yes."

"Do you realize that had you been a little more co-operative you could have earned as much money in a few days as you will normally earn in several years?"

"I don't doubt it, but you would have made me pay very dearly for it. You cannot help tyrannizing people. They need big material rewards in order to put up with you."

"What will you do when you stop working for me?"

"I shall return to my everyday life."

"Have you a lover?"

"No, Mr. Richmond."

"Any family?"

"No longer."

"Friends?"

"A few acquaintances, yes."

"Do you like the life we lead on this yacht?"

"Enormously."

"And what do you think of me?"

"What a funny question. I don't think I've ever stopped telling you since I entered your service."

"And what would you think of me as a husband?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, we're just talking nonsense. Answer me."

"I've never thought of it."

"Well, do for a moment—just as a joke, of course."

"What can I say? You could be my grandfather."

"I am not a lecherous old man. For years I haven't looked at a woman from that point of view, and I don't intend to start now."

"Then why should you want to marry me?"

"Because you amuse me. It's rare, you know, for a rich old man to find distraction. You are either a ridiculously honest little creature or an incredibly deceitful one. I shall only find out which by marrying you. After all, what have I to lose? One more mouth to feed won't strain my budget."

"It's such a tremendous surprise. It would completely change my life. Frankly I don't know."

"Well, think about it, Miss Meisner. But remember that the more you think the more discourteous it will be to me."

"May I ask you a question?"

He nodded.

"You've just given me some very plausible reasons why you should marry me. But from your point of view what would be my reasons for marrying you?"

"I like your frankness, my dear. Not another woman in the world would have replied like that. I'm rich and I'm old. Could you find any more valid reasons?"

"They couldn't put me in a worse light."

Carl Richmond laughed. "In all sincerity I don't see what more I could offer you."

"Well, try to if you want me to take your proposal seriously." She stood up. "I'm going to send for my suit-case."

The old man's dry hand closed over hers.

"Men have very little humanity in them, my dear. If I have lost touch with it you mustn't be too angry with me."

He watched her steadily while the hotel servants helped him back into the lorry.

When at last he was settled she clambered over the tailboard and seated herself on a packing case facing him. Now, taking his eyes from her face, he said, "I'm a sick old man who should by rights be pitied. Is that an argument in my favour?"

"Definitely not, and you know it perfectly well."

He gave a sigh of relief and the conversation remained on a lighter level until they were back on board the yacht.

THE MARRIAGE took place three weeks later. The ceremony was performed by the chaplain of a naval vessel stationed at Piraeus, the port of Athens.

Korff gave the news to the press services and overnight Hilde became an international celebrity almost without being aware of it. Outwardly, life went on as usual on board ship. However, the staff, though more deferential, seemed to have blacklisted her, unable to forgive her meteoric rise.

Anton Korff of course was radiant. His goal had been reached. As the millionaire's confidential secretary it had been easy for him, without revealing his recent paternity, to substitute the name of Korff for Meisner on all the official marriage documents.

The *Lucky* went on her way, staying in harbour only long enough to take on supplies. The elderly bridegroom seemed delighted with the new state of affairs, and his wife, who was a wife only in name, felt as though she were living in a luxurious fairy-tale.

She began to grow attached to her husband in her own fashion, even to feel a budding tenderness for him. His bad moods were never directed at her. He showed her all the gentleness of which his nature was capable. Often he was amusing and their moments alone, when they played chess or chatted together, were never boring. Everything went well—too well, without the suggestion of a hitch.

Hilde should have been suspicious of so much happiness. But being German, she had a sentimental side, and now that she had become Richmond's wife she did not really see what she had to fear.

The highlight of the honeymoon came when the *Lucky*, bound for New York, put in at Hamilton, Bermuda. The old man insisted that his young wife should go ashore and enjoy herself.

Hamilton was a revelation to Hilde, whose youth had been completely sacrificed to the war. She was beautiful, wealthy and the centre of attraction for all the idle rich on the island. She was criticized, envied and finally accepted. Marvellous parties were given in her honour and handsome young men appeared as if by magic to swim and to dance with her.

She flirted a little, enjoyed herself enormously, spent vast sums of money and, all in all, decided that life was really worth living.

But Hamilton was only a port of call. Carl had promised to open

his New York house and to give parties there for her before they flew on to California, where they would spend the winter. Hilde was in the seventh heaven.

A few days before their arrival in the city of her dreams, Anton Korff came to her cabin for a little business conversation.

They smiled at each other, pleased at their shared success.

"We've seen each other very little since your marriage," he began. "But I've been looking after your future and, in consequence, after mine. By a series of delicate hints and suggestions, I've at last persuaded your husband to cancel his former will, which left everything to charity, and to make another in your favour. The new will, drawn up in his own hand and signed before witnesses, will be deposited in his New York bank. Thus, my dear daughter, I can guarantee your future."

Hilde began to laugh.

"You're quite a man, but it doesn't seem to me to be all that urgent. My husband has never been in better health."

"Marriage is the best form of rejuvenation. But it's better to be safe than sorry. I've taken care of everything."

"May I ask you what provisions have been made for me in the will?"

"He has left you all his worldly goods, my dear, with the proviso that you finance a hospital, an old folks' home, a museum of art and two or three rather minor charities."

"And what of your own position?"

"Unchanged. And now, my dear child, I should like to settle a little detail which does concern me. Today is Friday, and we shall be in New York on Monday at the latest. You will be caught up in a whirl of social events before you leave for California. Therefore, I should like you to give me that signed cheque for two hundred thousand dollars now."

"I must say you lose no time."

"May I remind you that you are leaving for California by plane? As things are now, if anything happens to you, all I shall get is twenty thousand dollars. I don't like taking useless risks."

"Very well. Hand me my cheque book, will you? It's on the desk."

Anton Korff gave it to her and produced a fountain-pen. For a moment no sound could be heard but the scratching of the pen. Then, handing him the cheque, she said, "There you are."

He examined it. "Thank you, my child!" He waved the cheque in the air to dry the ink, then put it carefully away in a notecase. "Now, let me wish you all the luck in the world," he said.

Eight

SUNDAY is the Lord's Day. Most men visit Him then in His churches. A few have the rare privilege of paying their respects to Him in person. In the early hours of that Sunday morning Carl Richmond had already appeared before his Creator.

It was Hilde who discovered him on going to his cabin to take breakfast with him. Even before she touched him she knew that he was dead. His hollow chest no longer rose and fell; his staring eyes seemed to see right through her.

She stood still in the doorway, not daring to move, and called his name twice in a whisper. The sound of her own voice made her shiver. At last, almost without volition, she closed the door and went over to the bed.

She put out her hand towards the old man's but could not bring herself to touch it. She seemed incapable of marshalling her thoughts. He was dead. But what had he died of? And how long had he been dead? And why had he not called out?

The bell he had not rung was within reach of his hand. So he had died suddenly. Automatically she picked up the glass on his bedside table and smelt it; there was nothing but a little water in the bottom. The carafe, too, contained only water; it was three-quarters full. She did not know what to do. She was completely bewildered. On the previous evening she had been with him, making plans for their life in America. They had been alone together until about ten o'clock when the Jamaican had brought them tea and biscuits as he did each night.

Richmond had drunk, as he always did, from an enormous hand-painted china cup his first wife had given him. He was oddly sentimental about it.

And now he was dead.

Very slowly, her brain began to function again. She must do something. Like a sleep-walker she left the cabin, locked the door behind

her, and made her way to Anton Korff's cabin. She knocked several times and was almost hysterical when he finally called, "Come in."

Obviously surprised, Anton Korff raised himself sleepily on one elbow and switched on the bedside lamp.

"He's dead!" she blurted out.

"Who's dead?"

"Mr. Richmond—Carl."

There was a moment's silence and suddenly he was sitting up in his bunk. "What did you say?"

"I went to his cabin as I do every morning to breakfast with him and I found him there dead. Oh, it's terrible. Yesterday . . . last evening we chatted together the whole evening."

"Come, pull yourself together. Whom have you told?"

"No one. I came at once to find you."

Anton Korff got up and put on a silk dressing-gown. "I want to see for myself. Go on ahead, I'll follow you."

At the cabin door Anton Korff took the key from her, then opened the door and drew her inside, carefully closing the door behind them.

Instinctively Hilde hid her face in her hands, but the secretary calmly felt for the old man's pulse. He soon dropped the wrist and nodded. "It's annoying," he muttered. "Very annoying."

"What's annoying?"

"That he died so soon. It's no help to us. What did he die of, do you think?"

"How should I know?"

"He hasn't been dead long. It must have happened at dawn. For heaven's sake stop crying. We've got to think quickly or we may find ourselves in a mess."

"But why?"

"Because the new will hasn't been filed yet. Now let me think."

He began to pace up and down the cabin.

"Perhaps we ought to call someone," Hilde said timidly.

He did not seem to hear; then suddenly he stopped in front of her.

"Are you out of your mind? He's dead and no one can do anything for him. It's he who can do something for us if we keep our heads. There are a few million dollars at stake and I've no intention of giving up or of letting you. Now listen carefully. We need a little time. Ring

for breakfast, but for heaven's sake keep the steward from coming in. He mustn't suspect anything nor must anyone else. Come and join me in the saloon as soon as you can. But we mustn't look as though we're plotting anything."

"You're not going to make me stay here with him? I can't do it."

"Pull yourself together. You will supposedly be breakfasting with your husband, as you always do. There's nothing wrong. Smile, relax. Play your part well and everything will be all right."

Anton Korff half opened the door, looked down the empty corridor and after a little wave of encouragement disappeared.

Hilde shut the door. The secretary was right. She must keep her head. She did not see how things could be managed but, since he had said so, it meant that he had something in mind. She took up the receiver of the house phone and ordered breakfast.

The silence in the cabin oppressed her. As she turned out the bedside light and lit the one in the bathroom, she decided she would have to distract the servant's attention by making him think that his employer was washing. She pushed the empty wheel-chair into the bathroom, turned on the bath water and then waited, listening.

Finally she heard the Jamaican coming. There was a knock on the door.

Hilde began to speak in a voice loud enough to be heard over the noise of the running water.

"No, Carl, I prefer the blue. I've always thought I looked best in blue. . . ."

She opened the door, standing so that she hid the bed. Smiling, she caught hold of the breakfast trolley and pulled it into the cabin. Over her shoulder she said, "It's breakfast, Carl. Finish your shaving. . . . I'll see to it."

She dismissed the servant with a wave of the hand but he seemed anxious to be of service this morning.

"Shall I open the curtains, madam?"

"No, don't trouble. Has New York been sighted yet?"

"We can see the coast in the distance. Shall I help Mr. Richmond?"

"I'll ring if we need you."

She pushed the door closed and leaned there a moment, trying to collect herself. Then she turned off the bathroom tap and slipped out

of the cabin. She locked it, and, keeping the key in her hand, went to meet Anton Korff in the saloon.

He was waiting for her, beautifully tailored as usual, and leafing through a magazine.

"Smile, my dear," he said when he saw her face. "Someone may come in unexpectedly. We must appear to be chatting casually."

"What are we going to do?"

"Nothing. I've thought it all over. We must act as if Carl Richmond were still alive. That's the only way out."

Hilde swallowed hard and looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Listen. Everyone knows that your husband was an old eccentric and a misanthrope. What's more he'll be very tired when he goes ashore tonight and he won't wish to see anyone. It won't be the first time he's done that. Tomorrow the new will will have been filed and by a curious coincidence your husband will die of a heart attack. I know several doctors who will sign his death certificate without making difficulties. For a substantial fee, of course. Then you will be one of the richest widows in the country and I shall have no worries about my old age."

Hilde opened her mouth wide and continued to look at him blankly. At last she managed to stammer, "How can we possibly leave this boat with a corpse?"

"My dear, you must cultivate presence of mind," he said smoothly. "The harbour authorities will present no problem; I always deal with them myself. Your husband is confined to his wheel-chair; he will be sitting in it when we land, wearing dark glasses and a hat pulled down over his eyes. A specially designed car will meet us. He can get into it without leaving his wheel-chair. As soon as he gets home he will shut himself up in his town house and refuse—naturally through you—to receive anyone."

"You must stay with me. I shall never be able to do it alone."

"To hold your hand, I suppose? My dear, I shall have enough to do with the doctor and the lawyers. Of course, the immediate problem is to dress him and get him into his chair. You must help me. It won't be pleasant but there's no other way. You go back to the cabin. I'm going to fetch some straps."

"What for?"

"Well, it would be unfortunate if he were to topple out of his chair as you were taking him ashore."

Hilde repressed a shudder.

She lived through the next hour as if it were a nightmare. Fortunately Korff kept his composure and did most of the work. It was he who dressed the corpse and attached him solidly to his chair with straps hidden beneath the jacket. The ankles were tied to the foot-rest and a light rug put over the legs. A tape, hidden by a silk scarf, was also passed round the neck to the back of the chair and then brought round to fasten the shoulders. As a last touch Anton Korff put on the dark glasses which Richmond often wore and pulled a hat down over the eyes. When Korff had finished nobody could possibly have guessed that the old man was dead.

"Don't forget," Korff said. "As soon as we're alongside it'll be entirely up to you. You must let no one come near him. As soon as you get to the house, you must shut yourself up in his rooms, and refuse to see anyone. Don't forget to have some dinner sent up for him. You'll have to eat both your dinner and his. The dishes must go down empty to the pantry.

"And whatever you do, don't forget to talk loudly. There will obviously be servants wandering about in the corridors. Your husband is sick but he is alive. If you don't forget that, everything will be all right. I'll attend to the rest."

"But suppose things don't go as you say?"

"Don't worry. If something unforeseen upsets the whole plan, don't answer any questions before you see me. Do you understand?"

"I'm almost dead with fright."

"That's quite natural. Now go and relax . . . preferably on deck. You must be seen. Everyone on board knows you're eager to arrive in New York."

Nine

IT SEEMED to Hilde, as the hours went by, that she was balanced on a tight-rope, watching another part of her which she did not know. As they neared New York she fixed her binoculars blindly on the

famous skyline and did not even notice when the yacht came to a dead stop. Then she saw the launch bearing the health, immigration and customs authorities draw alongside.

The play was about to begin. Everyone was at his post—even the old man, strapped in his wheel-chair, who was only waiting for his entrance.

She went into the saloon and watched nervously through the picture windows as Anton Korff and the captain dealt capably with the officials over passports and other documents on deck.

Finally, to her dismay, Korff brought the immigration inspector into the saloon to interview her. But the man asked her only a few routine questions and, after expressing concern for her husband's health and wishing her happiness in her marriage, took his leave with Korff very politely.

After a time Hilde realized that they were under way once more, and a moment later Korff rejoined her.

"Everything is under control," he said reassuringly. "We've been cleared for landing. I just want to tell you that we probably shan't see each other again until tomorrow. I may be late because of the lawyers, but I'll come with a doctor as soon as I can." Then he left her.

Feeling lost and alone, Hilde stood at the rail as the yacht passed the Battery and proceeded up the North River. New York with its towering skyscrapers seemed hostile. Slowly dusk descended, and lights began to twinkle in the buildings. She went on to the bridge, then, to watch the officers bring in the ship.

At last the engines stopped and the gangway was lowered. Down on the wharf, the dock of one of Carl Richmond's companies, a small crowd had gathered and a large black limousine waited. Hilde felt as though she were waking from a dream. Anton Korff had said, "Your role begins as soon as you disembark. You must play it well, for no one can help you."

In a few hours everything would be over, but now, in spite of her repugnance, she had to go down to her husband's cabin, order one of the Jamaicans to wheel him along the companionway and into the lift and finally take him down the gangway and place him in the car.

As soon as she entered the cabin, the sight of the old man, gloved and hatted, made her tremble.

When the coloured boy entered she was terrified to see him look questioningly at his silent employer. Almost in a trance she went over to the chair and pulled the scarf a little higher over his mouth.

"I don't want you to speak, Carl, it's very damp outside. Keep that scarf over your mouth so that you won't catch cold."

She turned abruptly to cover his lack of response. "Take great care as you put him in the car. Mr. Richmond is in a hurry to get home."

She opened the door and held it for the boy to get through. When they reached the lift she helped him again with the sliding doors. Then she got into the little cage and stood beside the chair.

She must find something to say. This oppressive silence could not last. Carl Richmond never remained quiet for very long.

Bending over her husband she said feverishly, "Don't worry, Carl. The car's outside and you'll soon be back in bed."

At last the gates opened and they were on deck. The gangway was a few yards ahead and the way was free except for a ship's officer who saluted as they passed. The danger lay beyond on the dock, where the crowd had gathered. The car, a cross between an estate car and an ambulance, was parked only a few paces away but they would have to cross this space with all eyes focused upon them. Why didn't that idiot chauffeur move it nearer? Not until they were on the pier did he move from the position he had taken at the open double doors at the back.

"Welcome to New York, madam," said the chauffeur with a hand at his cap.

"Hurry up, please," Hilde said nervously. "My husband is very tired and ill."

An immediate antipathy was born between them. The chauffeur scowled at her, took the chair from the Jamaican, and wheeled it deftly up a portable ramp into the car. Then he stared hard at the old man.

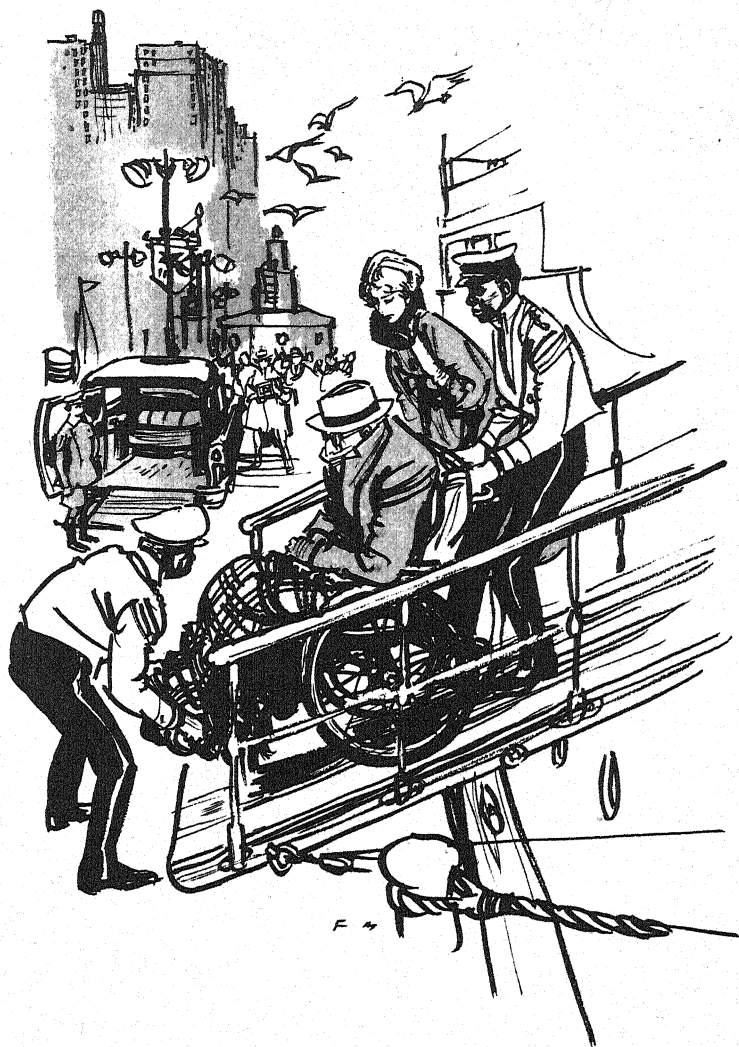
"Mr. Richmond doesn't look very well," he said.

"I've told you my husband is ill. I'm anxious to get him home and into bed."

"As you wish, madam." He helped Hilde on to a bench in the back of the car facing the wheel-chair, and closed the doors. She heard the bolt pushed home and then the purr of the engine. Only when they were moving did she let herself relax. She was still terribly frightened.

She sat with her eyes half closed, gathering her strength as the

SAVING CHRISTMAS



limousine glided smoothly through the unfamiliar city. Once she looked up and caught the chauffeur looking at her curiously in the driving mirror.

At last the car pulled up before a house which Hilde later learned was situated just east of Fifth Avenue near Central Park. Her only impression of it that night was of overpowering magnificence.

The butler, an old man in a tail-coat, came out to meet the car and she felt once more on the verge of panic.

The chauffeur had already opened the doors of the car and helped her out, so she placed herself between the butler and her husband.

"Is the master's room ready?"

"Yes, madam. The luggage has arrived and everything is ready."

"How very thoughtful of you," she said, forcing a smile.

The impassive chauffeur did not stir. Something had to be done at once.

She hardly recognized her own calm voice when she said pleasantly, "My husband is extremely tired after his trip. I think he has fallen asleep. Do you think you could possibly take him up to his room without waking him?"

The butler bowed with a respectful smile and summoned a footman to help take out the wheel-chair.

"You may go," Hilde said to the chauffeur. "I will give you my orders tomorrow."

The butler walked a little behind the chair. "We have prepared the bedroom on the ground floor for Mr. Richmond," he said. "Shall I serve dinner there?"

"Oh, don't bother, please. My husband will go straight to bed. I'm terribly tired too." She felt physically incapable of eating two meals.

"I'll send the valet to put him to bed."

She nearly betrayed herself by crying out but somehow she caught herself. "Oh, you needn't trouble." And since he looked at her with surprise, she went on. "He gets so little sleep. I don't want to disturb him now. I'll call you as soon as he wakes up."

The bedroom, that haven of peace, was on the other side of the great hall. Out of consideration for the sleeping man the butler hurried forward to switch off the overhead light. The shaded lamps glowed very dimly.

"Thank you," Hilde said with a smile.

"I shall remain up all night, madam," the butler whispered.

"No, please don't do that. We only want some rest. I promise to ring if we need you."

Carl Richmond was in the doorway now. The footman pushed him over the threshold and turned round, waiting for orders.

"Good night," said Hilde.

He left and the butler bowed.

"Good night, madam. I hope you'll have a restful night. Oh, before I forget, my name is Barnes."

"Yes. Thank you. I shan't want you any more, Barnes."

She shut the door—perhaps a little too rapidly—but it was over. She had nothing more to fear now. There was no further reason for anyone to enter this room.

Only then did she realize the sumptuousness of her surroundings. For a moment she was taken aback; then she suddenly realized that it all belonged to her.

She locked the door and, feeling strangely sorry for Carl Richmond, she pushed the wheel-chair into the darkest corner. Then she sat down in a big chair by the fire-place and, completely exhausted, fell asleep immediately.

Ten

IT was broad daylight when Hilde woke. Hungry as she was, she hesitated to ring for breakfast, but then she told herself that not to do so would arouse suspicion. As she pressed the bell she forced herself to glance at the corpse. Richmond was still wearing his hat! She took it off. But when she tried to remove his gloves, she could not unfold his hands.

She had just wheeled the chair over to the fire-place, with its back to the door, when someone knocked.

Hilde opened the door, and insisted on taking the tray, which must have been sent up as a matter of course when she rang. "I'm expecting Mr. Anton Korff this morning," she said to the servant who had brought it. "Please show him in to us as soon as he arrives."

She managed to eat all the food on the tray, which she then put outside the door. Feeling much more herself now, she went into the luxurious bathroom to bath and change. For the first time she began to be confident that everything would turn out all right. She had just about accomplished an impossible task—no ordeal in the future could be so difficult.

But as time passed and Anton Korff did not appear, Hilde's optimism waned. The house was as quiet as the grave. The servants must be below stairs gossiping, glancing with surprise at the silent service bells. She would have to do something. She had said her husband was ill. It would look very strange if she did not send for a doctor.

In her indecision she went to the window, parted the net curtains and pressed her hot forehead against the window-pane. In Central Park the leaves were turning yellow on the trees. It was the first sign of autumn. Soon the days would shorten and it would grow colder. It would be nice to think about furs. . . .

A little cough made her start. She turned and saw the grave-faced butler in the doorway. She went to him quickly, standing so that she screened the wheel-chair with her body.

How long had he been there, and how much had he seen? She was speechless with panic.

"I knocked," said Barnes apologetically, "but since Mr. Richmond did not answer I took the liberty of entering."

"What do you want?" she managed to stammer out.

"Wouldn't you like me to send for the doctor, madam?"

"No, please don't bother," she said.

She must get this man out of the room immediately. "There's nothing particularly wrong with my husband. He's very tired and needs rest."

"Would you like me to help you to get him into bed?"

"There's no need, thank you. I'll send for you later."

Despite his deference, Barnes's curiosity was aroused by his master's untypical silence. He could not make up his mind to leave.

"The chauffeur is downstairs," he said. "Shall I give him your orders?"

"Not for the moment."

Hilde leaned towards the lintel of the door to indicate that the interview was over, but by making this slight movement she ceased to hide

her husband. The butler bent forward and addressed the back of the old man's head as he had doubtless done many times before.

"On behalf of the staff and myself, sir, may I offer you our warmest congratulations on your marriage."

Hilde closed her eyes. The servant slowly raised his head and Carl Richmond, of course, neither turned nor replied.

This was ruin. And yet she heard her own voice say, "He's fallen asleep again. We mustn't disturb him." And she added in her confusion, "He usually sleeps so badly. . . ."

The butler said nothing, bowed and went out.

When the door closed behind him, Hilde was at breaking point. Things were getting beyond her control. She began to walk round in circles, incapable of thought, a prisoner to her own anxiety. The calm of the room broken only by the ticking of the clock, the ghastly silhouette of her husband and, above all, the terrifying silence gradually overwhelmed her.

The shrill ringing of the house telephone brought her back to herself. She rushed over to it and nearly collapsed with relief when Barnes announced that a gentleman was calling to see her. This would be Korff, at last.

Almost at once there was a knock at the door. It was not Anton Korff but a tall ruddy-faced man of about forty, greying at the temples, and wearing a rather loud tie.

Hilde stared at him and could not utter a word.

With a short bow he introduced himself. "My name's Lomer," he said. "Martin Lomer."

Suddenly, as though something had snapped, a strange calm descended upon her. As far as she could remember, the visit of this stranger had not been part of the original plan, but since he was here, whether Anton Korff or destiny had sent him, he must be a friend.

Automatically she pointed to a chair, but the stranger remained standing with his hat in his hand.

"Perhaps I've come a little too early. You must still be tired from your journey." And then his eyes, which had been fixed on her, fell on the old man.

Hilde turned slowly and looked in the same direction.

The stranger went over to the motionless figure, stood there for a

moment staring at the corpse and then said gently, "Why haven't you reported your husband's death, Mrs. Richmond?"

Hilde wanted to speak, but she was incapable of it. There was no longer any connection between her will and her physical self. She was floating in an unknown element, a nebulous kind of dream or sleep where nothing seemed important.

There was a very long silence.

The man, with his hands crossed behind his back, rocked to and fro on his heels, staring into space. At last he stopped rocking, looked at the corpse again and let his hand rest for a moment on the forehead.

He turned to Hilde.

"When did this happen?"

"Yesterday morning on the ship."

"What was the matter with him?"

"A heart attack, I imagine."

"May I ask why you covered up his death?"

She must answer him. The man didn't seem unfriendly. He must be the doctor of whom Anton Korff had spoken and he would need some details in order to sign a legal death certificate. These thoughts ran vaguely through Hilde's mind but her lips would not move and she did not utter a word.

Once more it was Lomer who broke the silence. "I want to help you, Mrs. Richmond, but you must answer my questions. Who knows of your husband's death?"

"No one."

"Who helped you to bring him here?"

"Some servants, a chauffeur. . . ."

"Do they know that he's dead?"

"No, they didn't notice it."

"How did you manage to keep people from talking to him?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "My husband was a sick man. He could not move about except in his wheel-chair. His strange character made this undertaking not easy but possible."

"But what was your purpose in bringing him back here dead?"

"How does that concern you?"

Martin Lomer drew up a chair and sat down.

"Mrs. Richmond, why did you let me in?"

"I wasn't expecting *you*."

"And may I ask who you were expecting?"

"My father, Anton Korff."

"Did your father know of your husband's death?"

"No, that's why I was waiting for him—so that he could tell me what to do."

"I see. And what do you intend to do now?"

"That depends on you."

"On me? How do you mean, on me?"

"I don't know. I don't know any more. You must go. I'm tired. It's all been so difficult. How did you get into this room? Who sent for you? Who are you?"

The man frowned. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Richmond, I shall have to ask you not to leave this house. I am going to notify the District Attorney's office."

"But who are you?"

"Martin Lomer, Captain of Detectives attached to Homicide, Manhattan East."

The room began to turn and the walls to topple. Clutching the foot of the bed, Hilde managed not to fall. At length she asked, "Why are you here?"

"Your behaviour and that of your husband seemed strange to the chauffeur last night. When he came for his orders this morning he found that everyone here was suspicious. He tipped me off."

Hilde's legs collapsed under her and she slumped on the bed. Martin Lomer, his hands in his pockets, stood watching her. She seemed to have lost all her self-control.

"I have money," she said, biting her lip. "Lots of money. Far more than you'll ever earn in the police force."

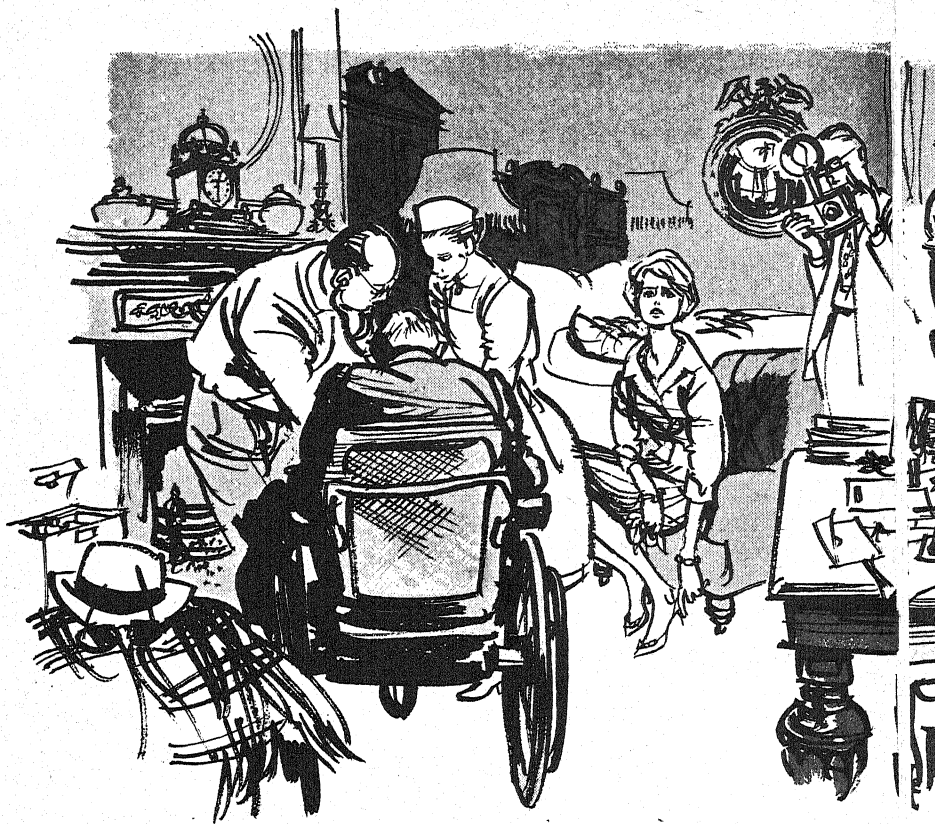
"Please stop. Let me give you some advice. Get yourself a good lawyer immediately—before you make any more bad blunders."

"What blunders? What do you mean?"

"Attempted bribery, to begin with."

She began to sob. "I can't think any more. I don't understand. . . . I've never been so tired in my life."

He looked at her dubiously. "If you really want some rest, Mrs. Richmond, tell the boys in Homicide the whole truth quickly. If your



story holds water you'll have nothing to worry about. If it doesn't, you'll never get to see a bed."

"But why do you speak to me like this? I'm not guilty of anything."

"That remains to be seen."

"I didn't kill him."

"But who mentioned murder?"

Martin Lomer went over to the telephone. He dialled a number, then asked for Inspector Sterling Kane.

THEY ARRIVED barely half an hour after Lomer had hung up. In a few seconds the millionaire's beautiful bedroom looked like a circus.



Two policemen in uniform guarded the entrance. Photographers took innumerable flash shots. The medical examiner sounded the old man's heart. Plain-clothes men searched the room, examined Hilde's handbag, stuck labels on various objects.

Inspector Sterling Kane, of homicide, Manhattan East, was sitting at a table which had been quickly cleared, examining some papers with Lomer. No one paid the slightest attention to Hilde. Her hands were trembling and she could not string two ideas together. Everything had happened too quickly and too violently.

After a time someone took her by the arm and made her stand up. She blinked meekly in the light of the flash bulbs and then sat on the chair which was offered her opposite the inspector. She watched curiously as a white-uniformed nurse pushed her husband's wheel-chair from the room.

"I'll send you my first report this evening," the medical examiner said to

Kane as he left. "And another after the autopsy."

Suddenly the room was almost empty. The uniformed police were no longer there, the doctor, the nurse, the detectives and the photographers had gone. She found herself alone facing the two men at the table.

Sterling Kane folded his hands, leaned his elbows on the table and took his time in looking her over.

She also examined him carefully. He must have been about fifty with a rather heavy build. His short hair was grey, and his eyes were small and alive. He wore a gold wedding ring and he had certainly grown fatter since he began to wear it. How long had it been there, she wondered. Fifteen years? Twenty years . . . ?

His voice suddenly broke into her thoughts. It was gentle and friendly. Hilde tried to concentrate on what he was saying but caught only the words ". . . say may be used in evidence against you." Then, after another blank: ". . . prefer a lawyer."

She looked Sterling Kane straight in the eyes and then decided to trust him.

"I should like a cigarette, please."

Sterling Kane brought a crumpled packet of Lucky Strikes from his pocket and she took a very bent one, rolling it gently between her fingers to restore its shape. The two men watched her without a move. At last she put it to her lips and the inspector gave her a light.

"Do you feel better, Mrs. Richmond?"

She nodded.

"Do you feel capable of answering some of our questions?"

A second nod.

"How long have you been married, Mrs. Richmond?"

"A few weeks."

"How many exactly?"

"I'm not quite sure. We were married either the end of June or early July."

"Aren't brides usually more exact about their weddings?"

"We were married on board ship. We had been sailing for some time. I had no reason to mark off the days."

"That's the good thing about holidays."

She gathered at once that he had only said this to take her off her guard. She wanted to prove it, and suddenly she asked him, "When were you married, Inspector?"

"The fourth of April, 1928. It was a Wednesday. It rained all day except in midafternoon when they took the photos."

Hilde lowered her head. She knew that he had just gained a point.

"How did you meet Mr. Richmond?"

"He wanted a nurse. I applied for the job."

"Did you know how wealthy Mr. Richmond was?"

"It did not take me very long to find out."

"Why did you transport your husband's corpse from his yacht to his house?" He had not raised his voice. He asked his questions without appearing to attach any importance to them.

"I'm waiting," he said gently.

"I prefer not to answer that."

She thought that he would protest, but he merely nodded.

"Were you married before?"

"No."

"Have you any children?"

"No."

She did not understand the gist of these questions. Was he trying to distract her or were these apparently irrelevant details useful to him?

"What did you intend to do with your husband's corpse? It's odd, don't you think, Mrs. Richmond, to have taken so many risks to get it here without having any preconceived plans?"

She made an effort to smile, and said nothing.

"Have you any money of your own, Mrs. Richmond?"

"None."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-four."

"Where were you born?"

"In Hamburg, Germany."

"I congratulate you on your English. Have you been in America before?"

"No, this is the first time."

"Why did you kill your husband?"

Hilde half rose, staring at him open-mouthed. Then she gasped, "But I didn't kill him! I swear I didn't kill him!"

The inspector motioned her to sit down again.

"Don't get excited, Mrs. Richmond. It was only a shot in the dark. Until we have the medical examiner's report no one can really know whether your husband was murdered or not."

She sat down and with difficulty recovered her self-possession. Without looking at him she said, "I shall say nothing more except in the presence of a lawyer."

"You're quite right to want a lawyer," he said.

"I did not kill him."

"Although you don't seem to be convinced of it, he very possibly died in his bed. Your mistake was not leaving him there."

With that he stood up and left the room without looking at her.

Martin Lomer got up at the same time and beckoned to Hilde to follow him. Instinctively she drew back.

Lomer, who seemed to pity her, said, "You will be better off at the police station. At least the reporters will leave you in peace there."

Hilde saw that she had no choice in the matter. He took her by the arm and led her out of the house, and into a dark green police car.

Eleven

ON THE following morning she was formally arraigned in court. The judge asked her if she had a lawyer, saying that if not he would appoint one. But Hilde, having thought things over, had decided to make no move before seeing Anton Korff. He must arrive soon, and he would know how to get her out of this quickly. She explained to the judge that a lawyer would be provided for her, and refused his offer. Then, after a brief statement by the Assistant District Attorney, she was held without bail, and remanded to the Women's House of Detention.

An hour or so later, she was driven to Sterling Kane's office for further questioning. As she entered, it seemed to Hilde that the atmosphere was ominous. She could almost smell danger.

New faces sized her up, heavy-jowled and indifferent. A police fingerprinting technician pressed her fingers on a card, assuring her that it was a routine matter. Then she sat ignored, waiting, while everyone round her was incredibly active. She couldn't believe that an inquiry would take place in such a turmoil, with so many comings and goings, such incessant telephone calls. What was she doing here? How was she going to manage without Korff? There were framed photographs on Sterling Kane's desk. They must be of his wife and children. She wished feverishly that she could see them, as though they might tell her something about this inscrutable man.

At last, when she had just about reached breaking point, the office fell silent, suddenly almost empty of people. Sterling Kane, imposing and ponderous behind his desk, turned to her. A clerk put a blank sheet of paper in his typewriter. Outside the window, in a little courtyard, a woman was hanging out her washing. Only Hilde noticed her.

"Mrs. Richmond," the inspector began, "we have learned a good deal about you since yesterday, and there are some questions I should like to ask you. In your lawyer's absence I must tell you that you may answer or not as you wish. You informed me yesterday that you first met your husband when you went on board his yacht as a nurse."

"Yes, I did."

"Had you never heard of him before that?"

"No."

"How do you explain the extraordinary coincidence of finding your father on board when you arrived?"

"I never said that."

"I told you we had learned a good deal about you. You are Anton Korff's daughter, aren't you?"

She hesitated, and saw the clerk look at her curiously. "Yes," she said.

"And you didn't know he would be on board?"

"No."

"Hmm. Strange. Now, when you went on board, did you know that Mr. Richmond had no direct heir to leave his fortune to?"

"You are assuming premeditated behaviour on my part. There was nothing of the sort."

"We will disregard the subtleties for the moment, Mrs. Richmond. Tell me, under what name did you board the yacht? I must warn you that we can check everything you say."

She realized then that they must already have interviewed the crew of the *Lucky* and examined every document. "Meisner," she said. "Hildegard Meisner."

"Thank you for that, Mrs. Richmond."

"When shall I see my father?"

"Very soon, I imagine. He flew to Florida almost at once. Didn't you know?"

"I didn't think he'd have gone so soon," she said quickly.

Sterling Kane stared at her hard for a moment and went on, "He'll be back on the first available flight. We've been in touch with him by telephone. Now, Mrs. Richmond, did you know the contents of your husband's will?"

"No."

"Did you ever discuss the matter with him?"

"Never."

"What were your relations with your father?"

"The usual ones. What do you mean?"

"I'm just curious. It's so surprising that you suddenly found him again after so long. You've hardly seen him in thirty-four years, have you?" Hilde did not reply.

"Since you did not know that your father was on board, Mrs. Richmond, why did you go there under a false name?"

Hilde turned pale and again she said nothing.

"A coincidence, I suppose. If you don't tell me the truth, you know, my imagination might lead me to draw some disagreeable conclusions. When you met Carl Richmond did you immediately decide to marry him?"

"It wasn't up to me to decide."

"Oh come. A charming young woman can easily get round an elderly man."

"My husband was not senile. He did only what he himself decided to do, and no one could ever make him change his mind."

"I don't doubt it. He was rather a difficult character, wasn't he?"

"I had nothing to complain of. For me there were only advantages."

"Well, yes. Your husband was very old and very rich; that is quite an advantage for a young and ambitious woman."

"My husband might have lived for years."

"Then why is he dead?"

"I have no way of knowing."

"Your wariness troubles me a little. You haven't even asked me for the medical examiner's report."

Hilde said nothing, waiting for him to go on.

"Mrs. Richmond, your husband was murdered."

A bomb had exploded in that quiet room. No one spoke. The staccato sound of the typewriter stopped. Outside the window the woman was gone. Her washing swung gently in the breeze.

At last, Hilde managed to ask, "Murdered? But by whom?" She still hadn't realized how this could affect her.

"I think you can answer that best, Mrs. Richmond. Who would have had most to gain from his death?"

"But that's ridiculous. I had everything I wanted while he was alive.

I was very poor before I met him, you know. It is because he married me that I have had money. What more could I ask?"

"You're not being very logical. You admit that you married him for his money, you are only thirty-four, and you are very attractive. Life has a great deal to offer to a rich, free woman. . . . I repeat free . . . which an elderly husband might get in the way of."

"This is a horrible misunderstanding. I'm not involved in any way. You must believe me."

"Yes, of course. Can you tell me, then, why you took the risk of transporting the body from the ship to the house?"

"I can't answer that question."

"You'll have to make up your mind to do so sooner or later."

"May I know how my husband was murdered?"

"He was poisoned. The medical report places his death in the early hours of Sunday morning. That means that the poison was taken after dinner on Saturday evening. Where were you at that time, Mrs. Richmond?"

"With him in his cabin," replied Hilde, completely overwhelmed.

"Did he eat or drink anything brought in from outside while you were there?"

"I don't know—I think so—yes. I went to his cabin every evening. We played patience. One of the Jamaican boys always brought wine and biscuits or occasionally tea."

"What did you drink last Saturday?"

"Tea."

"What did it taste like?"

"Tea, of course."

"How did the biscuits taste?"

"The way they always did. There was no difference."

"So you ate and drank the same things as your husband?"

"It's what we did every evening. I've just told you."

"Yes, but on Saturday evening he died of it. Since your health gives us no cause for anxiety, I must conclude that the poison didn't come from outside. Well, Mrs. Richmond, don't you think it's time you confessed?"

But Hilde said nothing. She slid silently from her chair and fainted face downward on the floor.

Twelve

ON THE following day Anton Korff returned to New York from Florida by plane, reported to Police Headquarters, and was driven immediately to Sterling Kane's office.

"Mr. Korff," Kane said at once, "I understand that Mr. Richmond engaged you in 1934 in Munich, and that you've been in his employ ever since. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"How did you get in contact with your daughter?"

"By chance. She appeared one day on the yacht after we had notified several agencies that we wanted a nurse. I must admit that it never entered my head for an instant that this Miss Meisner could be my daughter. It still seems something out of a novel."

"When did you realize that you were related to her?"

"Just before the wedding when I had to draw up the necessary papers. They had to be correct, of course, and it was then that Miss Meisner told me her name was really Korff and that its likeness to mine was no mere coincidence."

"And what was your reaction?"

"Oh, quite unromantic, I'm afraid. Like a good many men, I had a few love affairs in my youth. This girl was the result of one of them. I admitted paternity, but I never concerned myself about the child personally and I soon stopped seeing the mother. A little later, I met Carl Richmond and my life took a turn which has completely satisfied me. This child had never been a problem."

"I see. But I am still interested in knowing what your reaction was when you met her."

"Surprise far exceeded any other emotion. Later I was rather flattered to be the father of such an attractive and intelligent young woman. I grew quite attached to her."

"Did your daughter tell you why she took a false identity when she came to your employer?"

"She was forced to for her purposes, and I don't think I'm giving her away by telling you so. Hilde spent her youth in a war-torn country.

No one can rightfully reproach her for wanting to escape from a life with no future."

"Go on, Mr. Korff."

"She only did what thousands of women do—she tried to make a good marriage. Hilde is intelligent and ambitious by nature and Carl Richmond doubly interested her, first because of his wealth and secondly because I was his secretary. She had always known that, of course, but she wanted to study me before revealing herself. When she did, I gave my every support. I felt I owed it to her for having neglected her so in the past."

"Was Mr. Richmond aware of this paternity?"

"Certainly not. He was a suspicious old man, and he would have thought it a put-up job."

"So you became your daughter's manager?"

"My daughter was sufficiently intelligent and pretty to manage on her own account. All I could do was to give her a little advice to spare her making blunders. I must admit that I was secretly rather pleased at the turn of events."

"Were you aware of the contents of your employer's will?"

"Certainly. I was his confidential secretary."

"Could you give me the details?"

"Except for a few bequests, Mr. Richmond's entire fortune went to charity."

"Did your daughter know this?"

"No, poor girl. She thought that as Richmond's wife she would automatically inherit. I didn't disillusion her because I knew Mr. Richmond intended to make a new will in her favour. Why—what are you getting at?"

"Not very much." But Sterling Kane was looking thoughtful. "In spite of the will, under New York State law she would automatically inherit, as his wife, one half of the estate," he said.

"I didn't know that."

"Still, the fact remains. What was to be your share, Mr. Korff?"

"I was to receive a legacy of twenty thousand dollars."

"That was very little for so valuable an assistant."

"I never gambled on Mr. Richmond's death but on his life. I am very well off today because he allowed me to share in his deals, and

gave me confidential information on the stock market. My basic salary has never been anything but nominal."

"In your view, Mr. Korff, who killed Carl Richmond?"

"I have no idea. He was a complete despot surrounded by rather uncouth servants, whom he treated as slaves. A murderous hatred would perhaps be understandable in their case."

"It's very noble of you, Mr. Korff, to divert suspicion to some poor menial but don't you think that there is only one king-pin in this case, your beautiful and ambitious daughter?"

"But . . . but it's logically inconceivable. I've already told you that Hilde's intelligent. She had just married him. The eyes of the whole world were upon her. It would have been a quite unthinkable blunder for her to kill him."

"It's only natural for you to defend her, Mr. Korff. Now can you tell me why you left New York so hastily for Florida?"

"As Mr. Richmond's right-hand man I had several important deals to conclude there in his name. There was nothing to keep me here."

"How do you explain the fact, Mr. Korff, that your daughter took her husband's corpse from the ship to his house?"

"I don't know. I only know what is rumoured publicly so I shan't answer that question until I've seen my daughter."

"I don't have to tell you, Mr. Korff, that you must remain at the disposal of the law."

"That's obvious. But when can I see Hilde?"

"I will arrange an interview for you tomorrow."

"May I send her a lawyer?"

"Yes, if she agrees."

"Does she need anything that I could send in to her?"

"Only luck, Mr. Korff, a great deal of luck if you know where to find any."

STERLING KANE kept his word and Hilde was allowed a visit from Anton Korff. He was surprised at the change that had come over her. She sat huddled in her chair, her hands clenched in her lap. Every now and then she shivered. Before speaking to her, Korff searched the little visitors' room, even examining the legs and underside of the table. Satisfied at last, he grunted his approval.



"I was looking for a microphone," he said in explanation. "There's none here. You must pull yourself together, my dear. I have the best lawyers in the country. We'll get you out on bail very quickly."

"They're convinced that I killed him," said Hilde, twisting her hands. "Who could have murdered him—and why?"

"I'm certain that it was one of the servants. It was bound to happen some day, he treated them so dreadfully. But that will all be found out."

"Why didn't you come to the house as you promised?"

"You know that I had to file the will. That took

time. Then when I got to the house I saw the crowd and the police cars and I realized that things had gone wrong. I had to be free to act for you—to raise funds, for one thing—so I immediately took the plane to Florida. Unfortunately I gave you credit for more self-reliance than you showed. I thought I distinctly told you not to receive anyone before seeing me."

"When Barnes told me that a gentleman wanted to see me, I thought of course it was you."

"And you didn't even ask who it was? It would have been much easier than transporting your husband from the ship."

"They keep trying to trip me up on that. They keep asking me why I did it when I knew he was dead. What can I say?"

"That's the only dangerous point." Korff, deep in thought, bit his lip. Suddenly he raised his head and took Hilde by both hands.

"There is only one thing to do—tell them the truth. Tell them that you knew your husband had made a new will in your favour, that you knew if you reported his death before that will was filed, it would be null and void."

"But they're convinced that I killed him."

"They'll continue to be until you've given a valid reason for transporting the corpse. Don't lose your head. You didn't kill him. The police have a vast, admirably organized machine. They will soon find and arrest the guilty person. Then you will be considered a victim of injustice. You will also be a very rich woman because our lawyers will defend the will."

"When will I be released?"

"Not for the moment. You're suspected of murder. But once you've explained everything to the police, I can ask to have you released on bail. Whatever you do, though, don't give away my part in all this. They might arrest me too, and I must be at liberty in order to help you." Korff outlined for Hilde exactly what she must say.

"Thank you for looking after me," she said when he had finished.

"Paternity entails certain duties," replied Anton Korff with a smile.

Thirteen

THIS VISIT did Hilde good. Her adopted father was right. Since she was not the murderer, she had nothing to fear. And, thanks to Anton Korff, the inheritance might still be hers. She would put her cards on the table at once.

Sterling Kane sent for her early the following morning. Her footsteps were quite firm as she entered the office, for now she felt she was fighting with equal weapons. Did Sterling Kane notice it? He gave no sign of it as he offered her a cigarette from his crumpled packet.

"How do you feel today, Mrs. Richmond?"

"Much better, thank you."

"I hope you've realized that it's best to tell the truth. The facts are against you, you know."

"I am ready to explain them."

His habitually impassive manner gave way to a look of astonishment. "Take plenty of time, and start at the beginning," he said.

Hilde cleared her throat, thinking of everything Anton Korff had told her, and embarked upon her story:

"When I was a child, my mother used to talk to me about my father and tell me about his great financial success. She never heard from him. She only knew what she read in the newspapers where his name was often coupled with Carl Richmond's. Then the war came. When it was over, I was all alone. I had a profession—I was a translator—but no money and no future, and my country was in ruins. At last I decided to find my father so that he might take care of me. I knew from the papers that the *Lucky* was on the Côte d'Azur so I got leave from my job and went there. Eventually, by gossiping with people in the yacht harbour in Cannes, I learned that Mr. Richmond was looking for a nurse. I applied for the job."

"So you had no preconceived idea of marriage?"

"No, I wanted to get on board. Once there I wanted to stay."

"Go on."

"My idea had been to study Anton Korff for a few days to see what he was like. I really don't know what I expected of him. But I realized almost at once that my opportunity lay not in my father but in his employer. Mr. Richmond behaved like a tyrannical old despot, but fundamentally he was pathetic. I could see that he really craved friendship, and I could offer him that without offering anything else. So I did. It would be absurd for me to speak of love on either side, I think. He was past it and I didn't want it. But he was perfect for me and he never humiliated me as he did his other subordinates. When he proposed marriage, I accepted. I'd never had any money and it seemed the most important thing in the world to me. Why would I have killed him when he gave me everything I wanted?"

"We'll talk about that later. Tell me about your relations with Anton Korff."

"We got along very well. When Carl Richmond decided to marry me, Korff needed my papers from Hamburg and I had to tell him the truth. He immediately decided to back me up."

"I see. Now, tell me the events just prior to your husband's death."

"I swear to you that if I had known that Carl had been murdered I should never have acted as I did."

"What do you mean?"

"Long before I met him Carl had made a will. Just before arriving in New York he drew up a new one in my favour, nullifying the previous one. It was signed before witnesses, and my father, who had urged Carl to make the new will, told me it was to be filed in New York.

"I thought that my husband had died a natural death, and I knew that the new will would not be valid unless it was filed while he was still alive. So I decided to conceal his death for a day. It was only a question of getting him from the yacht to the house."

"And then what would have happened?"

"A doctor would have signed a death certificate at the proper time."

"But you're out of your mind. Do you think that a doctor wouldn't have realized how long he had been dead?"

"It all depends on the doctor."

"Hmm. And where did you think you could find this tame doctor?"

"My father would have helped me."

"Did he know what had happened?"

"No, certainly not. But he's my father. He wouldn't want me to be ruined. He would have got me out of it."

"So you were expecting him when you opened your door to Martin Lomer?"

"Yes, of course."

THERE WAS rather a long silence. Sterling Kane sat there, staring down at his desk. Something was wrong but Hilde could not guess what it was. At last Sterling Kane raised his head and asked rather wearily, "Are you going to stick to this story about the will?"

"Why, of course. . . ."

"You seem to me a well-informed and intelligent woman, Mrs. Richmond. Didn't you know that a will doesn't have to be filed in order to be valid?"

"What do you mean?"

"It merely has to be signed by the testator and three witnesses."

"I don't understand you."

"What's more, there isn't any new will. We've investigated, of

course. Neither Mr. Richmond's lawyers nor his bankers have heard of one. So we're back at the starting point."

Hilde's hands went to her throat. Desperately, she tried to think.

"But that's impossible. Of course that will exist. I often spoke about it with my father. He was my husband's secretary and knew all about it. Ask him. He was going to file it himself on Monday. It was solely on his advice that I tried to conceal Carl's death until then."

"Oh come, Mrs. Richmond. This is altogether too childish. Your father is a very shrewd businessman, who would certainly understand legal procedure. Now don't cry. Just tell me how things really happened. Perhaps we'll find that you've been duped."

"I've told you the truth. I can't tell you anything else. . . . I want to see my father."

"Calm yourself, Mrs. Richmond. You shall see him. Now, I want you to rest and think all this over. And think over another question it will be my duty to ask you—why did you kill your husband?"

"Stop!" The inspector had to seize the girl's arm to prevent her rushing at his desk. She clung to the lapels of his jacket and began to scream, shaking with sobs.

When he had freed himself, Hilde was taken back to the House of Detention and given a sedative. Soon she sank into a kind of coma, fraught with nightmares.

Fourteen

SLIGHTLY calmer after a night's sleep, Hilde refused to answer any questions before seeing Anton Korff.

She knew he would explain things. But could he possibly have lied to her? And if so why? She kept turning these questions over and over in her mind.

In the early afternoon, as Sterling Kane had promised, she was taken to the visitors' room. Anton Korff was there alone, as on the previous occasion, sitting behind a table. She suspected that he had again scanned the small room for a hidden microphone.

Hilde let him open the conversation.

"I've good news for you," he said. "Your lawyer is going to ask for

bail this afternoon. If it's refused he'll ask the court for a writ of habeas corpus. Did you follow my advice yesterday?"

"Yes, I followed it."

"Well! You seem upset. What happened?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Apparently there is no will. The lawyers know nothing about it."

"How solemn you are, my dear Hilde. Which will are you speaking of? There is more than one."

"The last one, naturally. The one you said you would file."

"Well, what about it?"

"Are you trying to drive me crazy? I insist on an explanation. I've done everything you told me to. . . ."

"I must interrupt you. Why, my dear child, did you blindly follow my instructions?"

"Because I trust you, of course."

"Now there's a ticklish point. Why do you trust me?"

"Do you think it's worth while discussing that now? I only want to know why the lawyers haven't seen the will?"

"Ah, the big question's out at last. Now for the showdown between father and daughter, the affectionate daughter who's lost her trust."

"I didn't say so."

"No, of course not, but you're coming round to it. Lots of disturbing questions are going round and round in your pretty head. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps a good healthy showdown is what's needed between us at this point."

"Anton Korff—are you mad? What are you getting at?"

"I? Nothing. I've won. I've pulled it off, that's all."

"What have you won?"

"My dear child, just now I asked you a very important question, which you failed to answer. So, I shall ask it once more. Why do you trust me? Or, to be more precise, why have you trusted me from the very start?"

Hilde's face turned white. She clutched the edge of the table.

"It's interesting to note the credulity of certain otherwise adult human beings," Korff continued. "You're no longer a child, my dear, yet when I offer you, a total stranger, one of the largest fortunes in the world on a platter, you don't even hesitate but rush, all smiles, at

the large piece of cake in the mousetrap. How do you explain that?"

"I must be dreaming. Tell me this is just a bad dream."

"No, my dear. You were dreaming when you imagined that a fortune might be found in a little advertisement—as in a fairy-tale. It takes years of effort to make a fortune. It takes intelligence, and cunning, and sleepless nights. You're not of the breed for that. But you were just the trusting little instrument I needed to carry out a noble scheme which I had worked on for many years. It's very difficult, you know, to take over the fortune of a millionaire."

"You are incredibly evil." He shrugged.

"I'm going to be sentenced to death for something I didn't do. They'll electrocute me."

"You took your chances the day you answered my advertisement. You had some good times on the yacht. Why are you complaining?"

"I'm not going to let you get away with this. I shall tell how I met you through an advertisement, how you suggested this scheme and then adopted me."

"Come, my child. Nothing can damage my plot now. You'll merely be playing into my hands. Besides, I am your father. The documents prove it."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you think I wanted a Hamburg girl because I came from there myself? Little fool. I wanted a girl from my city because it had been destroyed. Because there are no archives left and if you know how to go about it you can get any official documents you want. So whether you wish it or not, the records show you are my daughter—my guilty daughter who is going to be executed and whose fortune I shall eventually inherit."

"I am not dead yet."

"No, not yet. Now please allow me to continue. My assumption of paternity was not absolutely essential, but I had two reasons for it. First, I felt that in the inevitable investigation of Richmond's death I would be in a strong position with the police as your sorrowing father. That seems to be working out very well. Second, my so-called adoption of you gave you the almost instinctive confidence in me which was so important to the success of the plan."

"But why . . . if there's no will . . . ?" Hilde was hysterical.

"Just a moment, you silly goose. Richmond did make a new will in your favour, and gave it to me to file with his lawyers. I have not done so—it's not really necessary, you know, for it to be valid. I have it here." Korff tapped his breast pocket. "When the time comes to produce it, I shall say I concealed it to save you from further suspicion.

"The all-important fact," he went on, "is that under the law a murderer cannot inherit from his victim. As a disagreeable old man's young wife, you had every motive for killing Richmond, and all your actions have given colour to your guilt. When you are convicted, Richmond's will in your favour will be null and void, just as if he had died intestate. The fine flower of my scheme, then, is that as his only living blood relative I shall inherit his fortune. That is the American law."

"You—a relative!" Hilde gasped.

"Yes. I am a distant cousin, and Richmond's files, which I have kept, will show his acknowledgment of it. He had no affection for me, nor I for him, but the law recognizes the next of kin by blood.

"You see, it was necessary for my scheme that Richmond should revoke his old will which left everything to charity, except, of course, my niggardly bequest of twenty thousand dollars. As his wife you would have had your dower rights, but as his killer you could not even have received that share. It was necessary that he make a will in your favour. As his murderer you could not inherit; therefore as his only living relative I will receive the whole estate."

"You monster!"

"One more point. All the talk about registering the will was only to get you to co-operate more completely with my plan. Do you understand now, little goose?"

"I'm not dead yet. You've shown your hand too soon. I shall repeat all this to the police. I shall show them the reply I received when I answered your advertisement. I. . . ."

"Ah, but I recovered that letter from among your things and destroyed it long ago. The advertisement itself can never be traced to me. Besides being anonymous it was posted from Hamburg where I haven't set foot for years. And I had the paper send the replies to a post-office box."

"The other women who replied could testify."

"Do you really think so? I had many answers, of course, but yours

was the only one I bothered with. Now have you any other threats?"

"Yes, Anton Korff. I'll find a way out of this. And even if I die on account of you how will the money profit you?"

"Are you really so childish as to think about remorse?"

"I'll give you whatever you want, but let me live. Take the fortune and let me go free. Let them punish the servant who killed Carl Richmond."

"My poor credulous child. Do you really believe those Jamaican serfs have the mentality of murderers?"

"But then who killed Carl?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Oh no . . . no . . ."

"It was I. Who else? Why would I base my perfect scheme on a natural death, which might not take place for five or ten years? I killed him. And you are the scapegoat."

"But you're insane. Why do you tell me all this?"

"It's part of my plan to tell you everything. Your reaction to all this will harm you with the police and will help me to play the sorely tried father. I shall defend you in the most praiseworthy way. For several months after your death I shall seem to be a dignified and lonely man trying to forget. Later I'll enjoy every moment of my triumph. Today I am only a rich man. I'm going to be a powerful one as well."

"But I'm still alive and I intend to go on living. I don't care about the inheritance. All I want is my freedom and for you to be disclosed for what you are. Why do you laugh?"

"Because you're such a charmingly conventional creature, with completely conventional reactions. It's so easy to play with you. What can you expect if you insist on believing in justice?"

"When I've told them about you . . . when I've told them everything . . . what will you do then?"

"My position is unassailable. I am already rich, thanks to my generous employer. By losing him I lose the source of even greater wealth. His legacy is of no consequence to me. You were not cut out to be an adventuress, my dear Hilde. You took the wrong turn. Unfortunately for you, you are a young and pretty woman who is known to have deliberately sold herself to an odious old man."

"I'm not the only woman who ever did such a thing."

"But you are the only one in this particular case. Your behaviour doesn't speak well for you. I am stronger than you, my dear. In my hands you have been a woman of straw. . . ."

At that moment there was a knock on the door.

Anton Korff smiled faintly and stood up as the door opened and a warder came in. "Time's up," he said.

"Don't worry, darling. You know that I shall do everything in my power to take care of things as quickly as possible."

Hildegarde, on the point of collapse, did not reply.

The warder stepped aside to let the anxious father pass.

Fifteen

SHE WAS taken back to her cell. Nothing happened. There was no thunder, no lightning, no miracle. Anton Korff had reassumed his unassailable role of a rich and upright citizen and returned to the world of free men. His only sorrow was his daughter—this designing female who had sought him out merely to exploit him and who had caused a scandal which would shadow his old age. But he would do his duty. He would stick to her whatever she might say. Nobody would believe her, of course, if she changed her story now. Her fate had been sealed before she ever faced a grand jury. Half crazed with terror, Hilde thought of all this as she paced her cell. Finally the only way out seemed to lie in telling the truth. Her statements could be verified, and as soon as Anton Korff became involved the police would grill him and would certainly find some hole in his story. She had been greedy and stupid, but she was not going to die for that.

She asked to see Sterling Kane. She thought that he would send a car immediately to take her to his office, but she was told that she would have to wait. Towards the end of the day when she asked again she was assured that Kane had not forgotten her. The irony of it made her shiver. But he did not send for her and day gave place to night. Night . . . a time for anxiety, fear and despair. The knowledge of her own innocence failed to console her. Then a desire for life rose in her like sap. Lying motionless on her narrow bed she felt the blood surging through her veins. Gently she ran her hands over her face. She opened

and closed her eyes, moved her legs beneath the coarse blanket. She was healthy and firm. She was alive.

Morning found her pale and depressed, but resolved to fight to the bitter end. Several times she asked to see Kane. Towards the end of the morning he sent for her.

"I am alone, all alone," she thought, and this desolate fact seemed to hurt almost as much as the accusation against her.

As she entered Kane's office no one greeted her and no sign of sympathy encouraged her. She sank into a chair.

"You wanted to see me," Sterling Kane said finally.

She made a pathetic attempt to smile. "I want to tell the truth."

"What, again?"

"Yes, the whole truth. I don't want to be put to death for a crime I didn't commit."

Kane made a sign to the clerk to take down her statement. Then he lit a cigarette but this time he didn't offer her one.

"I've been victimized. Everything was planned in advance by Anton Korff."

"Your father?"

"He's not my father."

"Ah, that's something new. Who is he, then?"

"He adopted me. I met him through a small advertisement in a Hamburg paper. He offered me a wealthy marriage and a life of luxury."

"I don't see the point of this new story yet."

"You must believe me. This time I'm going to tell you everything. Korff plotted the whole thing to get the inheritance for himself. He murdered my husband and forced me to take the corpse to the house. I've only just caught on."

"Come, Mrs. Richmond, what exactly are you driving at?"

"Anton Korff is guilty. You must arrest him. You can't let me die in his place. I've done nothing—nothing serious. I'm not the only woman who's married an old man for his money. Now I don't even want the money."

"If you would try to tell me one thing at a time I might find it easier to follow you."

"It was to pin it on me that he adopted me and got me to marry

Carl. He told me so yesterday. He's confessed. He planned the whole thing. It was part of his plot to tell me. I don't know why."

"That seems rash. When did he adopt you?"

"When I met him at Cannes."

"And you'd never seen him before?"

"No, never. I merely answered his advertisement."

"And then he adopted you. How many times had you met before he suggested this adoption?"

"Twice."

"And he won your confidence immediately—on your first visit? He got hold of you through a little advertisement, and guaranteed that he would get his employer to marry you—after which he planned to kill him and pin the crime on you. Then he told you about it. What exactly are you driving at, Mrs. Richmond?"

"I know that my story sounds grotesque—I've told it so badly. But it's true. It happened to me. You must believe me."

"Can you prove who your real father was?"

"My parents were killed in a bombing attack."

"Then how do you explain that the papers concerning your birth certify that you are Anton Korff's daughter?"

"But he faked them. He only spoke to me of adoption."

"These papers are legal copies of the records in Hamburg. Anton Korff hasn't been there since 1934."

"He paid someone to get them—an accomplice."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"I realize that you want to shift the responsibility for a crime on to someone else, but your story must hold water."

"But I am explaining things. I'm all alone and you keep on hounding me. You have made up your mind that I am guilty because appearances are against me."

"Then according to you, your father murdered your husband?"

"He's not my father."

"Answer my question."

"Yes. Anton Korff killed Carl and arranged to have me accused of the murder. He has my husband's last will, leaving everything to me, in his possession. If I am executed he will become Carl's heir because he's

a distant cousin—the only living relative. Now you know everything.”

“So,” said Sterling Kane. “Mrs. Richmond, have you ever tried to buy Anton Korff’s silence?”

“Of course not. I didn’t kill Carl. He killed him.”

Sterling Kane placed both hands flat on the desk and bent towards Hilde. “Life is sometimes very strange. Your father abandoned you when you were a child. That wasn’t very pretty, and it’s quite natural that you should feel resentment. But since he has found you again he has made up for those years of neglect and you have no more faithful friend than he in this whole business. Would you like me to prove it to you?”

She looked at him in amazement.

“Bring the tape recordings,” he said to his assistant.

The assistant fetched two recorders which he placed on the desk. Sterling Kane tapped one with the flat of his hand. “This one was on board the yacht,” he said. “Do you know how we got it?”

She could not speak for surprise.

“By following your father who, in order to save you, thought it his duty to retrieve these tapes from the yacht. Our men picked him up as he came down the gangway and then he tried to throw the machine overboard.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Each in his turn, Mrs. Richmond. Now first we’re going to listen to quite a different recording. You’re going to hear your father’s interrogation, and you’ll see how different his feelings are from yours.”

He motioned for the machine to be turned on. The sound was very clear. Had Hilde closed her eyes, she might have thought that the dialogue was actually taking place in the office.

“I can’t understand it,” said the voice which she recognized as Anton Korff’s. “My daughter must have been in a panic. It is natural that she did not confide in me. Her whole childhood accounts for that. I deliberately neglected her and even now I don’t know how to make reparation for the terrible wrong I did her.”

“Mr. Korff,” and this time it was Sterling Kane’s voice. “This interrogation is completely confidential. You have answered all our questions this afternoon. There are now only a few details to clear up, but they may be prejudicial to your daughter.

"You have told us that you left New York for Florida immediately after the yacht docked and you have given us your reasons for doing so. While you were gone, however, we went to your apartment where, among your mail, we found a letter posted from the yacht. We opened it and here is the text:

"Dear Father,

I enclose a cheque for two hundred thousand dollars. This is in settlement of all accounts. I give it to you because my husband is dead. It will, I hope, set your conscience at rest. Everything that has happened will be effaced by time, and this money will enable you to live pleasantly in the meanwhile.

Your affectionate daughter,
Hildegard Korff Richmond

"In this letter was a cheque, made out to you, dated last Friday. Can you throw any light on this matter, Mr. Korff?"

There was a long pause. Hilde could not take her incredulous eyes off the tape recorder. The silence went on for an eternity. Had she not seen the ribbon winding round the spools, she would have thought it had broken. "I think . . ." began Anton Korff's voice, but Sterling Kane suddenly cut off the machine and, bending forward to the girl, said gently, "I asked you just now if at any time you had tried to buy your father's silence. Do you remember? Now I ask you again. I'm waiting for your answer."

Hilde, open-mouthed, glanced from the tape recorder to the inspector. She could not seem to take in his words.

"Do you still deny that you killed your husband and that you tried to buy your father's silence for a sum of two hundred thousand dollars?"

Then, half stammering, half weeping, she said, "He made me sign that letter when he engaged me. He said that it was a guarantee of my good faith, that he would only use it if I refused to give him the two hundred thousand when I came into my inheritance."

"I thought he was going to take the whole fortune as Richmond's heir."

"Of course. That's what happened. But it's not what he told me at the start. Then he said he merely wanted me to increase the twenty-thousand-dollar legacy my husband was going to leave him to two hundred thousand dollars."

"How did you know his address in New York if you were in France when you wrote the letter?"

"Because he dictated it to me."

"And the second time you meet this stranger, you write him a compromising letter and sign it 'Hildegard Korff Richmond?' when you still didn't even know your husband?"

"But this letter didn't count. It was only a guarantee."

"Then why was the cheque inside it?"

Hilde stared at him and began to wring her hands. "He made me give it to him just before we arrived in New York."

Kane pressed a button on the tape recorder. The ribbon engaged on the spool in a sort of jabbering, then stopped, reversed and the voice went on: "... light on this matter, Mr. Korff?"

Then once more that terrifying silence and the mournful embarrassed voice of Richmond's confidential secretary.

"I think there's been a terrible misunderstanding. I often spoke to my daughter of the fabulous inheritance I was confident she would have on the death of her husband. It was natural for me to speak in this way. My employer had every intention of changing his will in her favour, and my daughter had made a host of enthusiastic plans. It is such a huge fortune. Some days before the tragedy, we spoke of it again and I made a few rather envious remarks which I really didn't mean. I said to Hilde that she was luckier than I, that without making an effort she would come into a hundred times more than I possessed after a lifetime of work. We did not mention the matter again, but my daughter is generous. I'm sure she had that in mind when she wrote this letter and sent me this cheque. There is no other explanation."

"Isn't it more likely, Mr. Korff, that your daughter, having killed her husband, wanted to buy your silence?"

"I refuse to listen to such a monstrous suggestion."

"Mr. Korff, a murder has been committed. I understand your feelings but we must get at the truth. How do you explain the fact that traces of powder containing a large amount of digitalis have been found in one of your daughter's handbags? The autopsy showed that Mr. Richmond was poisoned with digitalis."

"That's circumstantial evidence—"

"Highly purified digitalis is deadly in small doses, Mr. Korff. In her

role of nurse Mrs. Richmond might have had some. Or she might have obtained it in Bermuda. Who, apart from Mrs. Richmond and the Jamaicans, had access to the cabins?"

"No one. That was a rule."

"That's all I wanted to know, Mr. Korff."

Once more Sterling Kane switched off the machine. Then he motioned to his assistant to start up the other tape recorder. Korff was right; she hadn't a chance. His plot was absolutely watertight. She was not yet dead but she might as well be.

Her husband's voice suddenly echoed frighteningly through the room: "Do you understand, Korff? I want you to see my people in New York and get this drawn up as quickly as possible."

"Very well, sir. Although there seems to be no hurry. Your marriage has rejuvenated you."

To her horror Hilde recognized her husband's raucous little laugh.

"The young women of today are so strange. Perhaps it's because I'm getting old, Korff. But this one puzzles me. I keep wondering if she's a saint or a little gold digger waiting for me to die."

Once more the hideous little laugh, which even while he was alive had made her shiver.

"Now the new will. You're sure that your recorder's plugged in? I don't want you to bother me later. You'll have to reapportion the original bequests. I've decided I don't want my charming little wife to come into all my money. There's too much of it and she's too young. But I want her to have some. It will keep my memory warm. She's a good girl. In addition to the houses and the jewellery, let's say a couple of million dollars. Is that reasonable?"

"It's very generous of you."

Again the little laugh and then a silence.

"Well, that's understood. Let's say a million." It was the old man's voice again.

"You just said two."

"Did I? I don't remember. Well, say one. It seems a fair amount. See that it's all legal, will you? I'll sign it before I leave for California. And now what am I to do about you, Korff?"

The secretary did not answer.

"You're lacking in ambition, but you're a good man, and my only

blood relative. I've always been able to count on you. You're getting old. I must think of you. Well, how much?"

"In the preceding will I was to have twenty thousand dollars."

"Was that enough?"

"Since you ask me, no, sir."

"How much do you want?"

They could hear him clear his throat and suggest in a timid voice, "A hundred."

"A hundred what? Dollars?" The old man, delighted with his joke, gurgled with pleasure. "Come, speak up, Korff. A hundred dollars, or a hundred thousand?"

"A hundred thousand."

"Bravo! For once in your life you've ventured. I must encourage you. You shall have three hundred."

At this moment there was a knock at the door.

"What is it?" asked the old man.

"Probably the tea. Shall I switch off?"

"Yes, and don't forget . . ."

The old man's voice fell silent, cut off in the middle of his sentence.

By now Hilde was completely out of her depth. She did not understand what this recording meant and Sterling Kane did not enlighten her as he turned on the first tape recorder again. It repeated a few lines of the dialogue, then suddenly Kane's voice said, "Did you tell your daughter about the new will mentioned on your recording?"

"Naturally."

"How did she take it?"

"Well . . . she . . . what can I say? She was disappointed. She thought . . . she insisted that by a previous will she would inherit the whole fortune. Of course, I don't know what her husband had told her or promised her. She may have known more than I."

"You, on the other hand, gained by this will."

"I certainly did."

"And you were to see the lawyers about it on your arrival in New York?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you?"

"I had no chance to."

"Come, Mr. Korff, that's a poor reason. Wasn't it in order to save her that you made no mention of it? When it became obvious that she had killed her husband in a hurry, before the latest will could be drawn up and signed? The cheque for two hundred thousand dollars which she sent you proves her gratitude for the tip-off on the new will."

"That's not true."

"Then why did you go and get this recorder like a thief in the night? Why did you try to throw it in the water? Why did you give up three hundred thousand dollars? Mr. Korff, look at the evidence. You've done everything you could for her. You are not responsible for her morals."

"All this is a terrible mistake."

Kane stopped the machine and turned to Hilde. "What have you to say, Mrs. Richmond? Can you deny this evidence?"

"I do deny it. I shall deny it to the end. There *was* a will that left everything to me. I've never heard of this one and I am sure my husband didn't dictate it."

"Who, then?"

"I don't know. The voice sounded like his, almost uncannily. But somehow I am sure it was not."

"Mrs. Richmond, you will be brought before the grand jury soon. Indictment and trial on a charge of first-degree murder will surely follow. You must plan your defence—get yourself a lawyer. Why haven't the Richmond lawyers come to your defence?"

"Korff was to attend to all that."

"Now, Mrs. Richmond, you don't mean to tell me . . ."

"Why won't you believe me? Why do you automatically challenge everything I say?"

"Because it's my job to discover the truth and facts speak louder than words."

"But if you won't believe me, no jury will."

"That's why I must advise you to plead guilty. Your only chance is to throw yourself on the mercy of the court."

Hilde stared into space. She couldn't react. A little spring had broken inside her; the whole complicated machinery of her body seemed to have collapsed. She no longer felt fear. She wouldn't have felt cold, or hunger, or desire or anxiety. She knew that she still existed. Her eyes

could still see and her ears could still hear, but she was alone in a strange, dead world of her own. Back in her cell in the House of Detention, she lay down and fell asleep immediately.

The matron told her superior that this girl was obviously guilty, for only children and criminals could sleep the sleep of the just.

ALL THE next day Hilde was left to herself. She waited there, alone and defenceless, listening to her own heartbeat. Prayer would doubtless have helped her but unfortunately she had no faith. She had nothing, nothing except a little time.

In the late afternoon she was taken to the visitors' room.

Anton Korff was there. She felt no trace of emotion as she caught sight of him. She had no hatred left, no anger. She sat down facing him with her hands on the table, waiting for him to speak.

"I've just seen Sterling Kane," he began. "Thank you for behaving so really stupidly. You could not have done better for me."

Hilde did not reply.

"I've come just to say good-bye. You're to appear before the grand jury almost at once and, since you're sure to be indicted, I shan't be allowed to see you again without a witness. That won't make for very interesting conversation."

"What was all that about the will on the tape recorder?"

Anton Korff laughed. "I knew that would surprise you. It was a little invention of mine to create an immediate and urgent motive for the crime. I recorded it quite a while ago. What do you think of my gift for mimicry?"

"I knew it was not Carl speaking."

"But you must admit it was a good imitation. Of course, my master stroke was to go sneaking after that tape recorder like a conspirator. And yet things nearly didn't come off. Those eager policemen nearly knocked the thing into the water. Fortunately I hung on very tight."

"How you must worship money to concoct such a plan."

"Life is short, my dear. We must enjoy it while it lasts."

"I beg of you. I will do whatever you like, but let me live."

"Oh come, my dear. Let's not lapse into sentimentality."

"I may have been stupid with Sterling Kane, but my lawyer won't be stupid with you."

"I don't think you realize that I have several reliable witnesses who have cost me a great deal of money. One of them will testify that you lived in a furnished room in Cannes with a certain Madame Redot from 1946 on. It's going to be quite hard for you to convince anyone that you met me through an advertisement in a Hamburg newspaper when the testimony will prove you hadn't lived there for years."

"Perhaps the publishers I worked for won't feel that way."

"They know a Fräulein Meisner but not a Miss Korff."

"I haven't changed physically."

"Of course not. But nothing you will say will sound true unless somebody comes along to cast doubts on my story—and I can assure you it will be foolproof. Besides, where would you find such a person? And don't forget that you have no valid explanation of why you transported the corpse nor for the traces of poison found in one of your handbags. And above all, don't forget that this case has attracted wide publicity. In the eyes of the world you are a venal, intriguing, heartless murderess."

"Go away! I am ashamed that I ever believed in you." With a sigh she fell back in her chair.

"Good-bye, Hilde." With a last glance, he left her.

Back in her cell, Hilde suddenly felt desperately weary. There was no way out. If, by some miracle, she was not condemned to death, it would mean life imprisonment. Years of good behaviour might win her a few months of liberty at the end of her life. She was already thirty-four. She would be an old, embittered woman with no resources when she came out of prison. That was the most hopeful future she could foresee. She dropped down exhausted on the bed.

Automatically she took off her stockings. The fine soft fabric slipped down her shapely legs. Perhaps she would never again wear such beautiful transparent stockings. She ran them through her hands like a silken caress. They were a bond between her and life. Between life and . . .

Then, nervously, with swift jerks she stretched them to the limit of their elasticity. The nylons stretched but did not tear. She tried again. They could be used instead of a rope. She just needed to knot the two stockings together, to tie them so that they would not come loose at the wrong moment. It was easy to make a reef knot . . . there!

Everything would be better, there would be no more scandal, no more shame. No hell of questioning. No witnesses. . . .

Her hand ran over her warm live body. Never again to look at the trees, the sea, the white stretches of sand on long beaches, that was probably the hardest thing to bear. She was angry with herself for weeping now. She must not listen to the cowardly voice which told her that any life was better than no life at all. She must not hesitate.

She stood up, went to the door and glanced through the grille to be sure no one was coming. Far down the corridor she saw the matron approaching. Instinctively she hid the stocking rope behind her back.

The two women stared at each other as the key rattled in the lock. "You have another visitor," the matron said.

Hilde was bewildered. "Not Anton Korff again?"

"No."

"Sterling Kane?"

"No."

"Who is it, then?"

"How should I know? Come on."

Hilde walked down the long corridor in silence, in a dream. At last a door opened and she felt a hand pushing her forward.

As she entered the visitors' room a man rose to his feet. Who was this person? Who was it? Something seemed to snap inside her head. Vaguely she heard the door close and a voice she could almost remember spoke her name. "Hilde."

She stared at him blankly, rejecting the hope that rose in her breast.

"Who are you?"

"Julius, Hilde, Julius—your brother-in-law."

No, it was not true, it could not be. She had gone through her final ordeal. She should be left to die in peace.

"But it's really I, Hilde. It is Julius. I was reported killed in action, but I was only wounded. Afterwards I looked for you but I could never find you. There was nothing left for me in Germany but bitter memories. I came to America years ago and settled in Wisconsin. Please believe me, Hilde."

She gave in. Half weeping, half stammering, she sobbed, "Julius . . . You . . . Julius."

"I have come to help you if I can."



"My poor Julius, I'm caught in such a net that there's no escape for me."

"You mustn't say that."

"I should have died and not my sister and her child."

"Hilde, I felt that way for years but my memories no longer make me suffer. Time has brought me peace."

"My poor Julius, how you've changed."

"I shall never change again."

"How did you find me? My name isn't even Meisner any more."

"Your photograph has been in all the papers, Hilde. I knew who you were at once and I came as fast as I could."

"You've known me for so many years, do you think I'm guilty?"
He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. What does it matter? After what happened in the war who can be guilty of anything? You are my sister-in-law and the only relative I have in the world. So I shall defend you."

Hilde began to laugh hysterically.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Because I've just realized that you can save me and that it means nothing. I'm glad to see you, Julius, but I don't care whether I'm condemned or acquitted."

"You have touched rock bottom. It takes a long time to get used to being there."

"I need only one witness who knew me in Hamburg to crack Korff's story. But even if I were released tomorrow, what would happen to me? There's no place left for me in a normal world."

"I know, Hilde, I understand."

"I'm quite indifferent now to the money which led me into this horror. I don't care what happens to Anton Korff. Only one thing matters—a little spring inside me seems to have broken. I wish it would mend."

"The process of coming to the surface again is beginning. You are still alive, Hilde."

"But even if I'm freed, the scandal will follow me always."

"America is a big place, Hilde. It is easy to lose yourself and to be forgotten. I know that somehow you will be acquitted of this charge—then, why not come with me to Wisconsin? I have a good job in a plastics factory and I have never remarried. I have never wanted to before."

"Why should you now?"

"Because together we could try and forget our loneliness. I cannot offer to love you, Hilde, but perhaps we might give each other some reason for living. I shall never ask you any questions. You can tell me as much of this tragedy as you want to tell and I shall listen to you if that will console you."

"I don't know whether I could ever trust anyone again."

"It would give me a goal in life to try to prove you wrong."

"But why should you want me, Julius? I'm no longer very young."

I'm bitter and a pauper—even if I'm acquitted I could never touch that money."

"I don't want your money, Hilde, I only want no longer to be alone."

As they sat there, opposite each other, the door opened and Sterling Kane came in. Julius rose to his feet. "I am sorry to interrupt, Mrs. Richmond," said the inspector. "But there has been an important development. I must ask you to accompany me to my office."

"Why?" Hilde asked listlessly.

Kane smiled at her. It was a friendly smile. "We have news for you," he said. "I have come myself to fetch you."

Hilde looked at Julius, and saw something like hope in his eyes. She said, "This is my brother-in-law, Julius Klein, from Wisconsin, Inspector. I thought he was dead. He saw my picture in the newspapers and came on to help me. May he come along?"

"Yes, of course. I have already met Mr. Klein, you know. I have a car outside. Shall we go?"

The car parked in front of the House of Detention was a black saloon, with only its siren and a blinking spotlight to distinguish it from any other. But these opened the heavy New York traffic fanwise before them as they sped east and north.

Once in the old police station Kane guided them to his office, and in a moment a uniformed policeman entered with Anton Korff.

Hilde stared at Korff in amazement. His clothes were as immaculate as ever but somehow he seemed dishevelled. His cold eyes fell on her for an instant; then he nodded curtly, almost contemptuously towards Kane, and seated himself without speaking. The policeman stepped back and posted himself beside the door.

"Mr. Korff," Kane said. "You have been demanding my reasons for holding you here for questioning. I will give them to you."

"I shall listen most attentively," Korff said. He smiled blandly, folded his hands on his lap, and seemed to relax completely while Kane shuffled unhurriedly through a sheaf of papers on his desk.

At last the inspector looked up. "You see, Mr. Korff," he said, "after Mrs. Richmond had made certain statements to us, we cabled the Hamburg police as a matter of course and asked them to run a routine identity check on one Hildegard Meisner. The Hamburg police cabled back that a Hildegard Meisner had been employed as a translator for

a Hamburg publisher some months ago and disappeared from the city a few weeks after a certain matrimonial advertisement appeared in a Hamburg newspaper."

There was no change of expression on Korff's face. The bland little smile still twisted his mouth.

"We then radioed photographs of Mrs. Richmond to Hamburg," Kane continued. "The publishers for whom she had worked identified them as photographs of their former employee, Hildegard Meisner."

Korff shrugged. "These seem rather frivolous reasons for holding *me* in custody, Inspector."

Hilde's harried eyes darted from Korff to the inspector. Their faces were masks. Kane was fingering the papers, looking at them casually, as if they were unimportant.

"There is something else, Mr. Korff," he said. "A tape recording we found in your possession. One of the voices in the recording is admittedly your own, the other supposedly the voice of Richmond. Mrs. Richmond has said the second voice is not that of her husband." Kane looked at Korff, his expression mildly questioning.

Korff said nothing. His limp hands remained folded. He was a figure of resigned, ironic patience.

Kane spoke again. "The police managed to obtain another tape recording, Mr. Korff. It is a recording of a speech that Mr. Richmond made some time ago at a Waldorf-Astoria luncheon on behalf of a charity drive. The two records were given to a speech expert to compare. This expert agrees with Mrs. Richmond: the voice on the tape we took from you is not the voice of Carl Richmond. It is the voice of Anton Korff, disguised. Our expert will testify to this."

For just a moment the limp hands tensed, but when Korff spoke his voice was calm and contemptuous. "In courts of law," he said, "experts often counter experts, I believe. Whenever the defence presents a psychiatrist to establish legal insanity, the prosecution produces one to contradict him. There are doubtless speech experts who will disagree with your man's opinion—for a fee, of course."

Kane pursed his lips, made a tent of his fingers and seemed to consider Korff's remarks. Then he said, "Legal insanity is a shadowy area, Mr. Korff. But the identification of speech peculiarities has become a fairly exact and demonstrable science."

He consulted the notes on his desk. "Every human voice, I understand, has definite and peculiar elements of pitch, melody, rhythm and inflexion. And there is today an elaborate device that can *photograph* human speech and translate it visually on a chart—like a cardiograph, for example. The sound pattern of Richmond's authentic voice does not resemble that of the voice on the tape we took from you."

Kane returned to his papers. There was nothing remotely Oriental about this solid, square-jawed American, but somehow he reminded Hilde of an impassive Chinese adding up a score on an abacus.

"Circumstantial and scientific evidence is most valuable to the police in developing a case," he said, the tone of his voice pleasantly conversational. "Juries, however, are often most impressed by eyewitnesses. It happens we have an eyewitness who has come forward voluntarily."

He turned to Hilde and smiled warmly.

"You have a friend, Mrs. Richmond," he said.

"I have a friend?" Hilde asked unbelievably.

Kane nodded to the policeman at the door, who left the room and, to Hilde's astonishment, returned immediately with one of Richmond's Jamaican servants from the yacht. It was the one called John Thomas. He seemed at once very frightened and very determined.

For just a moment Korff seemed to lose his composure. He shifted in his chair and his eyes narrowed.

"You have come forward and made a statement, Mr. Thomas," Kane said. "I ask you now to repeat it."

The Jamaican stood facing Kane, his eyes avoiding Korff. In the accent of the Bahamian Negro he began to tell his story.

"A little before ten o'clock on Saturday night I had prepared tea for the master and his lady in the ship's galley. Mr. Korff came in. He seemed angry. He told me the master had complained the tea I served was weak. Mr. Korff said he wished to test the colour. He poured tea from the pot into the very large cup the master always used. He stood between me and the tea set, and I thought he did not wish me to see what he was doing. But I saw. He took something from his pocket. He dropped it into the cup. He stirred the tea. Then he said it was all right and I should take it to the cabin."

"Weren't you suspicious of Mr. Korff's action?" the inspector asked. The Jamaican shook his head. "Not then, sir. Sometimes the master

would not take the doctor's medicines. Then Mr. Korff would give them to him in drinks. It had occurred before. Not until I read in the papers about the murder, about the lady, did I think of it."

"You took a long time to make your statement. Why?"

The Jamaican lowered his head. "I was afraid," he said very softly. "I was in a strange land. I was afraid of the police, of many things. But I had to come. I knew that I must come at last."

"Why, John Thomas?" Hilde broke in. "Why did you do this for me?"

"Once I was hit with a plate of food," the Jamaican answered. "I was smeared like a dog that feeds in dust-bins. You put your hand on me, lady. You treated John Thomas like a human being."

"After the death of Mr. Richmond, did Mr. Korff act suspiciously?" Kane inquired.

"He was kind to me. He had never been kind to me before. He gave me money."

"Thank you, that is all."

The Jamaican was ushered from the room.

Hilde's eyes followed him. She tried to speak but could find no words.

Korff laughed. "I find this rather childish, Inspector," he said. "Can you imagine this man under cross-examination? He has admitted it was my onerous duty to administer medicine that a petulant old man refused to take willingly. He is simply mistaken as to which night the medicine was put into the tea."

Kane paid no attention to Korff's remark.

"Oh!" he said, as if he had just remembered something. "There is this."

He rose and took the cover from a tape-recording machine that stood on a small table.

"You like tape recordings, Mr. Korff. Allow me to play a few for you. These were made at the Women's House of Detention, incidentally. I was careful to have witnesses present who will certify the voices are those of Mrs. Richmond and yourself."

Korff had half risen from his chair.

"This is impossible?" he said. "It is a trick!"

"Why, Mr. Korff? Why impossible? You searched the room for

hidden microphones before you gloatingly confessed to Mrs. Richmond the murder of her husband. Apparently you are not aware of all that goes on in electronics. We used a contact microphone that works upon the principle of resonance. It was hung on the wall of the adjoining room. I will play the record."

The machine began to whirr. Korff's voice and Hilde's came clearly into the room. Hilde covered her ears. She could not bear to relive that scene.

Korff was standing now. His hand grasped the back of the chair so tightly that the knuckles whitened, but his face was cold and hard.

"Do you wish to hear it all, Mr. Korff?" asked Kane. "There is a great deal more, you know."

Korff shook his head. Kane switched off the recorder. Korff was laughing, a bitter, mirthless sound in the quiet room.

"Do you find the situation amusing, Mr. Korff?" he asked.

"It is the irony that makes me laugh," Korff said. "A girl who is a nobody from a ruined city. An ignorant black native. A common policeman. These are the lower animals who have destroyed a superior man."

Kane did not reply. He merely nodded to the policeman, who led Korff, unprotesting, out of the door.

Julius Klein, tense on the edge of his chair, had not spoken once. Now he said, "You are free, Hilde. Do you understand that? You are free!"

But Hilde had turned to Kane. She was still bewildered. "With so much information, with even the tape recording you took, why did you go on torturing me with those questions?"

"Because I had to compare your story with Korff's. I had to make sure that you were not accomplices."

"Then am I really free, Inspector?" Hilde asked.

"You are free of the murder charge, yes, but there is still the matter of illegally transporting a dead body. You have been a dupe of a keen and ruthless man and you will probably be treated leniently."

"But after that," cried Hilde, "what is to become of me?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"I shall be there," said Julius, taking her gently by the arm.

"For ever, until death?"

"If you wish it."



Catherine Arley

"I WAS BORN in Paris, not long ago . . ." says Catherine Arley, the attractive young French author of *Woman of Straw*. Frequent trips abroad, including visits to the Far East and the United States, added interest to her formal education, and gave her first-hand knowledge of the backgrounds that she now uses so effectively in her novels. She ran away from school to become an actress and for three years played at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs in Paris. She then left the live theatre for the films. It was while on location in Morocco that she met her future husband, a French manufacturer. After her marriage she gave up her acting career and began to write.

Woman of Straw is Catherine Arley's second novel, and her first to be published in Britain. It has also been published in several other countries.



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